

Christian education lessons for youth and young adults

CLICK

**CONNECT
YOURSELF
TO JESUS**
AND HIS WORD

Includes 52 lessons, resources for teaching each lesson, and the answers to the student activities.



BOOK 4
TEACHER

Click - Connecting You to Jesus and His Word, #4

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All of the scripture verses quoted are from the NIV Bible unless otherwise stated.

Translated into English from Spanish by: Laurie Anderson

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Presentation

P

I feel challenged knowing that people like you have acquired this book. The task of educating young people is not easy and we should be very careful when we search for material to do so. It will help you to know that this material is based on biblical teachings and has been prepared by an international team of people trained in different disciplines, but with the common denominator of knowing and loving the young people in their churches.

The 52 lessons have been divided into seven thematic units. Not all units have the same number of lessons, as they vary according to the topics covered. Considering the characteristics and needs of the stages of youth, this book is designed for two age groups: 12 to 17 years and 18 to 23 years. You have the freedom to adapt it according to the needs of your Sunday school class or Bible study group in your local church.

The book contains the full development of the lessons, and in each lesson you will find the following sections:

- The **objective**, which indicates what you want to achieve with your students.
- The **Memory Verse**, which is a verse at the heart of the lesson that we suggest you memorize with your class.
- The **Connect** section, which corresponds to the introduction of the lesson and suggests activities to get your class thinking about the topic. Introductory remarks to the issues are raised.
- The **Navigate** section is where the lesson itself is developed.
- The **Review/Apply** section provides additional questions to help the students process what you've been teaching.
- The **Challenge** section includes the development of practical activities that your students can carry out to internalize the lesson. The hope is that the students, through the development of these activities, will set in their minds and hearts the fundamental principles of the topic.
- Finally, **Warning** is a notice that appears at the start and at the end of most lessons. The first will help you remember that you should begin the class by recalling what was discussed the previous week. Follow-up is basic for the heart learning of the lesson. The warning window at the end will help you finalize the lesson.

It is our desire that this material will be of great help to your ministry with the young people of your local church; that you can guide them in learning about the teachings of Jesus, examples of biblical characters, and the Ten Commandments, among other topics.

Patricia Picavea

Editor in Chief, Ministry Publications



Help

for the teacher



To be a teacher is a great privilege and a great responsibility. Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” As teachers of young people, we can be used by God to guide them to be saints today. That is why every teaching must be based on the Word of God, that is the only thing that, as a “two-edged sword,” can penetrate the depths of our being and transform our lives.

In the preparation of the lesson, you will be the one who benefits most. You will have the opportunity to study the Word of God and first apply the passage under study to your life, and then transmit a fresh and vivid teaching to you students.

Here are some suggestions to help you prepare and present the lesson.

Lesson Preparation

1. Set aside time to pray for yourself and your students. Ask God for wisdom and discernment to understand the Bible passage and apply it to your life. Pray also for your students to receive the message of God for their lives.
2. Try to find a place and an appropriate time away from distractions in order to study the lesson. Try to do this about a week before you are to teach the lesson.
3. Have the materials that you will need: a Bible in several versions if possible, this book Click, dictionary, Bible Dictionary, some Bible commentaries, and stationery such as pen, pencil, eraser, paper, etc.
4. Look for the biblical passages that will be studied and read them several times and in different versions.
5. Read the lesson objective and make sure you understand what you want to achieve in the lives of students with the development of the theme.
6. Memorize the bible verse. You must be an example of what you are going to teach.
7. Read the entire lesson, corroborating the biblical passages. Make sure you understand the content.
8. It is best if you prepare your own summary of the lesson and not even take the book to class. Maybe you can include some examples of current situations among your students or from your own experience.
9. In the dictionary, find the meaning of the words you're not sure of.
10. Mark in your Bible the passages that will be used in the class in order to make them easier to find during the lesson. You can use sticky notes or pieces of paper in the indicated pages.
11. Review the introductory dynamics for the group corresponding to the age of your students (12 to 17 or 18 to 23 years). Practice the activity and if it is necessary to have additional materials, get them ahead of time.
12. Review and develop the student activities / questions to be familiar with the answers.
13. Check the challenge for the week. Think of creative ways to present it to your class to encourage them to follow through with it.



Presentation of the lesson

1. Arrive at the meeting place ahead of time. Check that everything is neat and clean. You can set up the place differently for each unit of study. Create a pleasant atmosphere for your class.
2. Begin the class at a specified time each week, even if you just have few students. This will motivate others to get there on time.
3. Every week, greet them each by name and welcome the new attendees.
4. Always start the class with prayer. We want your students to know through your example that communication with God is fundamental for approaching His Word.
5. Present the introductory dynamics for the lesson. Try not to extend it. The purpose of the dynamics is to grab your students' attention.
6. Write on a white board or chalk board the title and subtitle of each point in the development of the lesson as you explain it. Also write new words and sentences that highlight what you are explaining.
7. As you develop the points of the lesson, guide them to work in the activities proposed in the lesson.
8. Generate a dynamic class with the participation of the majority of your students. As you present your lesson, you can ask questions that will help in the development of the lesson. Ask them to read the biblical passages and share what they understand from them. Encourage them to give their opinions. Do not criticize any of them and avoid heated discussions. Base all your answers on God's Word.
9. Always apply biblical truths to practical life! You can use appropriate examples and experiences for the ages of your students. Help them reflect on what the Bible teaches, and make a decision and commitment to God.
10. Present the challenge for the week and encourage your students to do it. Remember to talk about it at the start of each class.
11. Encourage your students to invite other young people for the next class. In a creative way, you can tell them about the next week's class to build expectation.
12. Always end the class with prayer.
13. Remember that some of your students possibly have not yet accepted Jesus as their Savior, or maybe they need to reconcile with Him. Don't miss out on this opportunity and invite them to accept Christ or to reconcile with Him.

Other suggestions

1. Encourage your students to:
 - Memorize biblical texts.
 - Attend punctually.
 - Bring guests.
2. Memorization. This is a very important aspect in the teaching-learning process. The verses to memorize express the biblical truth taught on each topic. Explain the meaning of the Bible verse, difficult words, how it applies to our daily life, and use different techniques for memorization. Here are some ideas you can choose and apply according to your class situation:
 - Print the words of the text in a large size. Cut the paper into different forms, so it will look like a puzzle. Give the mixed-up pieces to your students to put together in the right order. Prepare sufficient puzzles for each group.
 - Give paper and colored pencils/markers/ pens to each group or student to creatively write and decorate the text.
 - Form two groups and ask them to review the text. Put a chair for each group at the same distance away from each group. Each member of the group must run toward the chair and write (legibly) on the paper the next word of the verse. The first group finished writing the text correctly is the winner.
 - Form groups and ask each of them to make up a song using the biblical text. Then ask them to sing it in front of the class.



Poverty that Enriches

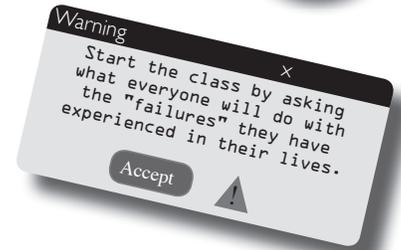
Lesson

1

Leandro Massacesi • Argentina

Objective: That the students understand the importance of being poor in spirit in order to find God's favor.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 5:3



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Newspaper and magazine clippings depicting homeless people, children living on the streets, lower income neighborhoods and images of celebrities, business people and politicians
- Instructions: Display the clippings on a table and allow a few minutes for observation by the students. Ask which images could relate to the biblical reference, "poor in spirit". If a student selects an image, ask him to explain his choice.

Application: Being "poor in spirit" has nothing to do with our outward appearance or economic status. No matter how rich or poor, any person can possess this spiritual characteristic. Children tend to have the necessary characteristics to be "poor in spirit".

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Write the following or similar phrases on a poster or cards that everyone can see. For example: "Words are midgets, examples are giants", "He who looks for a perfect friend ends up with no friends", "The worst decision is no decision", "Every ending is a new beginning".
- Instructions: Ask students to explain why the apparent contradictions are interesting. Generally, these types of contradictions teach important lessons. In today's Bible lesson, we will see how the poor in spirit find joy. This is an apparent contradiction, but its teaching lasts for eternity.

Connect

Navigate

Today's topic teaches that there is a poverty that can bring joy to a person's life. It is easy to relate poverty with descriptions and situations that are undesirable. Every day we hear news or see the negative effects and wounds that economic poverty inflicts on many around the world. We could discuss the topic for hours. We can witness these effects even in our families and churches. The effects of poverty are evident for all to see, and sadly they abound and effect all ages and cultures. Nevertheless, being poor in spirit is a trait that is produced in our inner being by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is also outwardly evident but far from devastating, it enriches, motivates and gives value to life. It is about a daily walk in humility. This is NOT a humiliated life, but a life on which the Lord looks kindly and shows favor. (Isaiah 66:2; Psalms 138:6; Proverbs 3:34).

1. Let the children teach us!

The Bible repeatedly reminds us that the mark of a true believer or true disciple is characterized by cultivating a life of humility. It is with this intention that Jesus taught the disciples (Matthew 18:1-4). They did not understand many things that Jesus said but they knew they were with someone very special because everywhere He went, spectacular things happened, and people flocked to see and touch Him, and ask Him difficult questions.

Walking with Jesus was a prestigious position because He was going to be the King of Israel! This implied fame and recognition.

The only thing was that Jesus had mentioned to them on several occasions that He was going to die, and that the values of His Kingdom were not the same as the world's values. They did not understand His words. Jesus then decided to teach them a lesson (Matthew 18:3). He called a boy that was walking by and once again used an apparent contradiction to get His point across: "...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."



ASK: What is the “coincidence” between Matthew 5:3 and Matthew 18:3? Both verses refer to eternal life. Evidently there is a connection between becoming like a child and being poor in spirit.

ASK: Do any of you have a younger sibling or relative near you? What characteristics do they have that would help us understand the topic?

“What stands out in children is that they have not yet incorporated complex judgments or twisted opinions that adults at times express. A child possesses an innocent perspective and freedom that promotes the ideal environment to develop faith” (God in Sandals, Christopher Shaw. Christian Development, Argentina; 2008, p 322). A child can teach us about trust and dependence. Before he can speak, he knows who cloths and feeds him. He knows he can fall into the loving arms that at times discipline or correct him. He knows how to find joy in simple things and share moments with another child regardless of race or economic standing. “Bad habits” are taken on later in life and sadly, sometimes, at an early age. So, the connection between being a child and being poor in spirit is the same principle characteristic: HUMILITY.

2. If we are, it is obvious ... and if we aren't, it is more obvious!

The arrogant spirit, along with its relatives “pride” and “haughtiness”, are visible traits. This was the Pharisee’s problem. They are the main characters in Luke 18:10-14.

In this passage, Jesus was not only speaking to the “worldly”, celebrities or athletes, although the message was for them as well. He was referring to a situation whose main character was a current religious leader.

Within the church, someone could let his talents, ministry or spiritual gifts become a source of arrogance, just as this Pharisee did in Bible times. “As we go through life we will fall over and over into pride or arrogance that is contrary to the spirit of the Kingdom. In these situations, our only hope is to renew our perception of our true spiritual conscience” (God in Sandals. Christopher Shaw. Christian Development, Argentina:2008, p. 147).

It is contradictory that the Pharisee who was closest to the altar in the temple was the farthest spiritually from the God to whom he was praying. The publican (tax collector) who did not want to get physically close to the altar, nor even raise his eyes heavenward, received what he wanted (Luke 18:13). The Lord had and has compassion towards all who recognize their position before His power. “The ax cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsman. He made it, sharpened it, and he used it. The moment he throws it aside, it becomes only old iron.” (Spiritual Leadership. J. Oswald Sanders Portavoz, USA:1995, p 63).

3. Manufacturer's warranty

A guarantee provides security. The manufacturer makes a commitment to the buyer to insure the product retains its quality for a determined time.

The type of poverty mentioned in this lesson has an eternal guarantee. There is a special place in the Kingdom for the “poor in spirit”. A believer must sincerely seek this type of poverty, or humility in his life (James 4:6,10) because this poverty enriches. It is being conscious that we are not the owners of the kingdom, yet we are sons and daughters of the owner.

The widow in Luke 7:13 was in the middle of a crowd when Jesus saw her, as He also saw the woman who washed His feet with perfume (Luke 7:37-48). These and many other examples recorded in the Gospels allow us to understand more about being “poor in spirit”. The announcement of Christ’s birth is also an example. The angels could have first announced to kings, princes, doctors, Pharisees, philosophers or others, but they chose humble shepherds as the audience for the most important announcement in the history of humanity (Luke 2:8-20).

Review/Apply: Read each passage. If the person mentioned was poor in spirit, choose “true”. If the person mentioned was not poor in spirit, choose “false”.

1. King Saul (1 Samuel 18:6-9) False
2. The Apostle Paul (1 Timothy 1:15) - True
3. The woman with the perfume (Luke 7:36-50) - True
4. The church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-18) - False
5. Daniel (Daniel 2:10-19) - True

Challenge: Encourage your class to organize a good Sunday School opening on this topic, or a performance for a special worship service. In this way, they will share with the whole congregation the importance of this teaching.



Blessed are those who weep

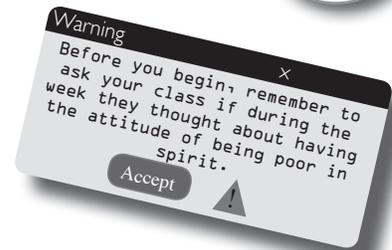
Lesson

2

Natalia Pesado • USA

Objective: That the students understand that God comforts those who are genuinely repentant.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.* Matthew 5:4.

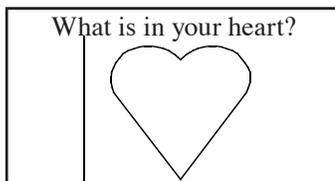


Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Each student will receive a piece of paper with a blank heart drawn in the center of the sheet. The sheet will be titled “What is in Your Heart?” The teacher will provide colored pencils. For example:



- Instructions: The teacher will write a list on the board of five common emotions. Color code the list as follows: red=anger, orange=happiness, blue= sadness, green= fear, purple=worry. Give each student a sheet and colored pencils and ask him/her to color the heart according to how he/she is presently feeling. The saturation of color should be in proportion to the emotion being felt. For example: if the student feels very happy, he/she can color half or the entire heart an intense orange color. Take time to listen to each student’s explanation of his/her feelings.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: A dictionary, blackboard, chalk, six large balloons of different colors.
- Instructions: Using the dictionary and student participation, define the following common emotions: anger, happiness, sadness, fear, worry and confusion. Write the definitions on the blackboard. Blow the balloons up and assign an emotion to each balloon (red=anger, orange=happiness, blue=sadness, green=fear, purple=worry, brown=confusion). Ask each student to write on each balloon what he/she does when feeling each one of these emotions. After writing on a balloon, they must pass it to the person on their right. (For example - “listen to music, pray, ask for a hug from a family member”.) Once each student has written on each balloon, read the results out loud.

Connect

Navigate

1. Godly sorrow

In 2 Corinthians 7:10, the Apostle Paul makes an important distinction between two types of sorrow, “godly sorrow” and “worldly sorrow”. It is interesting to note that many people do not know the difference, and this confusing phenomenon occurs even among believers. There is a natural tendency in all humans, believers or non-believers, to avoid all negative feelings that could produce sadness or pain. Generally, we believe that “sadness is bad” and we do not want to feel it. As a result, we make huge efforts to avoid situations that produce sadness or at least reduce suffering.

There is a sorrow that is “worldly” and “brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:10) and it is understandable that one would want to avoid such a situation. Apparently, the affirmation that sorrow could bring about death seems an exaggeration. Nowadays, sorrow can produce suicidal thoughts or other negative behaviors that could lead to habits that slowly destroy lives. Some of these habits are drug or alcohol addictions, irresponsible sexual conduct, driving at high speeds or violent relationships. In these cases there is no denying that sadness can bring about death. It is very important to avoid these behaviors or be influenced by disorderly conduct as it can have serious consequences for our lives. We must understand that sin brings about consequences that usually bring about more sin and deeper consequences. Paul warns the believers in Corinth about this type of sorrow.



On the contrary, Paul also speaks of “godly sorrow” that “produces repentance unto salvation”. This type of sorrow is as difficult to endure as the previously described sorrow, and yet it does not bring about death. In contrast, this sorrow motivates a person to change a bad attitude or behavior that has caused suffering. Sorrow accompanied by comfort and God’s guidance can bring about unexpected qualities, and wonderful and extraordinary growth. It is similar to a seed that must spend time in the dark soil in order to germinate and bloom.

2. Sorrow Due to Repentance

Luke 7:36-50 tells the story of Jesus’s visit to Simon the Pharisee’s house for dinner. A woman unexpectedly entered the house and began to weep and wash Jesus’ feet with her tears. Luke describes her as “a woman who had led a sinful life in that town” (Luke 7:37). Some Bible scholars comment that she was possibly a prostitute. The description suggests that everyone around knew she had committed certain sins and her situation was no secret to those present. Simon thought Jesus did not know who was touching Him (Luke 7:39), but Jesus knew this woman’s heart as well as Simon’s judgmental thoughts. Jesus began telling the parable of two men who owed money (Luke 7:41). Jesus focused on the woman’s attitude (Luke 44b, 45b, and 46b). He later declared her forgiven (Luke 7:48,50). This woman showed “godly sorrow”. She knelt before Jesus in complete submission and humility. She wept to the point of soaking His feet with her tears, and finally drying His feet with her hair. She also bathed His feet in a very expensive perfume that filled the room with its fragrance. When we study the details of her behavior, we can observe an attitude that demonstrated genuine repentance and complete surrender to Jesus. This woman recognized her condition and knelt in humility, weeping as she realized she had sinned.

It is wonderful to note Jesus’s tender, sensitive, forgiving response to this repentant woman genuinely displaying “godly sorrow”.

3. Sorrow due to Compassion

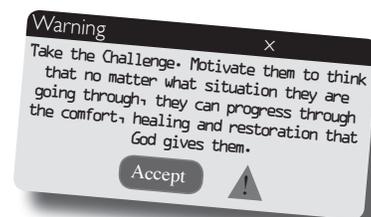
John 11 tells the story of Lazarus’ death. Lazarus was one of Jesus’ close friends. The gospel of John makes note of Jesus’ reaction as he stood before Lazarus’ tomb. “Jesus wept” (John 36:11). When faced with the loss of a loved one and seeing the suffering around him, even Jesus wept. In this case, Lazarus’ sisters were left without their brother’s protection and care. During Bible times, this was very significant. Through Jesus’ tears we can understand God’s compassionate heart for those going through difficult circumstances. God Himself, motivated by His perfect and infinite love, is full of mercy and compassion (James 5:11). He suffers with us.

To be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16), we must imitate His heart and suffer alongside those who suffer and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Jesus’ example motivates us to be compassionate, and as we go through difficult time on this earth, we will receive comfort from the Holy Spirit. This is how we obey God’s command in Galatians 6:2 and Matthew 12:31. When we truly love our neighbor, we will feel sorrow and compassion, especially if our neighbor is distanced from the Lord. This is the same sorrow God feels when His children grow distant from Him and face loneliness, bitterness, anxiety and pain (Lamentations 2:11). When we are moved to compassion, we must use the weapon of prayer (Ephesians 6:18) to intercede on behalf of our neighbor and seek genuine freedom and restoration. There are believers suffering afflictions, but Jesus says, “take heart for I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). This “godly sorrow” can have truly extraordinary results not only for believers but for all those around!

Review/Apply: What should I do? Ask them to say what they can do when they feel sad based on what they learned in today’s lesson.

1. When I am sad about my own sins. *Repent sincerely, Seek God’s forgiveness in fervent prayer*
2. When I am sad about what is happening to others. *Ask God for wisdom to act if necessary, to fast for others with compassion like Jesus.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Do you remember a situation of deep sadness that you experienced in your life? Do you still think that this situation causes you sadness or distress? Ask God to help you experience “godly sorrow” and move forward with His perfect comfort, healing and restoration. Remember that God can help you; he can change your sadness into dancing!



Can I Be Meek?

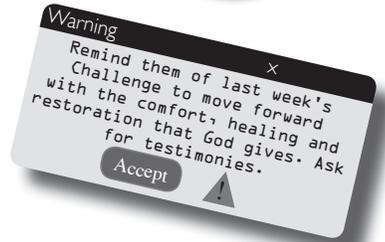
Lesson

3

Zeida Lynch • USA

Objective: That the students understand the importance of being meek in order to find God's favor.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* Matthew 5:5



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials – Prepare posters with an acronym for the word “MEEK”. Give each student a poster with only one phrase.
- Instructions: Ask them to figure out the word (MEEK) by using the phrases that describe what it means to be meek. Once the word is mentioned, take time to discuss the meaning of being meek.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials – Blackboard and chalk
- Instructions – Write the following words on the board: docile, submissive, calm, tender, good-natured, mild mannered, friendly. Ask if someone knows one word that would describe all the words. If no one can, tell them the word “meek” is a synonym of these words. Discuss the meaning of the word “meek”.

Connect

Navigate

“Meekness is that poise and selflessness in those who are truly strong which free them from the compulsion to prove their strength” (Beacon Theological Dictionary. USA, p. 417). Although many associate the word “meekness” with being weak or passive, its true meaning is quite the opposite. For example: A young man who is being made fun of by his friends for his Christian values continues to be friendly and cooperative. Although he is being unjustly attacked, he does not seek justice in his own way.

1. Characteristics of a meek person

Share some of the highlights of Moses' life (Exodus 1 and 2). If the students know about Moses, ask them to mention stories or what they know about him.

Moses' heart and life took an enormous turn after he had a personal encounter with God. Moses grew to have an intimate fellowship with God.

Ask the students to read the passage found in Numbers 12:1-15 and ask: What were Moses' sibling's complaints? The complaints began because his wife was a Cushite (from Cush) and because God only chose to speak through Moses and not through them. The Bible does not mention Moses' answer to the complaints, but it does state that he was very humble, more than anyone else on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3). It is interesting that God took action to defend Moses. God told Aaron and Miriam that Moses was His servant and He punished Miriam by allowing her to get leprosy. What was Moses' attitude? He cried out to the Lord to heal Miriam of the leprosy. What qualities can be seen in Moses? He did not defend himself against his sibling's complaints. He did not seek revenge, but rather interceded for his sister when she was punished. Moses gives us an example of what it means to be meek. Even though he knew God used him, he did not fight to prove his authority. He trusted in God's calling and he had compassion for others. Although Miriam's punishment was fair, Moses' showed his heart of mercy when he interceded for her before God.

Jesus' example

Jesus is our example in all areas of life because he lived out everything he preached. Matthew 7:28-29 says that people admired his teachings because he taught with authority.

In Matthew 11:25-30, Jesus mentions that the gospel is simple enough for a child to understand (9:25-26). He continues to speak about His deity and challenges his disciples, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls...”(v. 29).

When Jesus invites the weary and heaven laden, he was not referring to physical work. The Jews during this time period not only had the laws given by Moses, but also had to keep the laws that were added due to tradition. They



understood that they had much to bear if they wanted to please God. For this reason, Jesus directed this message to them. The gospel is about being, not doing.

Nowadays people have also added things to Christianity (rituals, rules, types of worship, etc.) that can hinder spiritual growth. Jesus invited all people that felt burdened by external circumstances to carry their burdens with humility and meekness following His example (v. 30).

What is the key to finding rest for your soul? Learn from His meekness.

Philippians 2:5-8 says that Jesus made Himself nothing. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but out of love for humanity, He gave up His rights as God. He was born in a lowly manger, lived as a normal boy and developed His ministry among people who were not considered popular. He drew near to lepers, women who were rejected, outcasts, sick people, etc. Throughout his entire life He showed unconditional love to those who did not deserve it. To the very end, He endured the worst punishment when He died on the cross.

How hard it is for us to put aside what we believe to be our rights. (For example: wanting to be first on a list, wanting benefits, acknowledgements, or choosing our friendships depending on how convenience or popularity or not giving up our place on the bus for a handicapped person.) To give up our rights is unpleasant, but this is the example Jesus gives us. Meekness must flow from our hearts. In order for that to happen, we must learn about Jesus, spend time with Him, let Him show us areas in our life that are not meek, and ask Him to help us change. We can only learn from Jesus if we have a personal, direct, daily relationship with him.

2. The reward of meekness

The Lord shows us the reward and promises he give to us if we obey. We know He never fails, so His promises become incentives to continue being victorious (Matthew 5:5).

a. “They will inherit the earth”

In Matthew 5:5b, Jesus is referring to the Israelites. To them, inheriting land was an important blessing. After fleeing Egypt and living in exile for years, they yearned to reach Canaan, the Promised Land. In Jesus’ day, the Jews also yearned for the freedom of their land. Although they lived in the promised land, they were under the Roman Empire, and they longed to be governed by the promised Messiah. This promise was a significant blessing. Jesus was not only referring to physical land, He was speaking of a bigger blessing.

Jesus said that the meek, those who laid themselves down to be taught by Him, will receive great blessings. These blessing are on this earth as well as eternal life in heaven.

Take some time to discuss was it means to be part of a nation. There is a land where the laws protect, and there is a story and future to be shared. Christians are a part of God’s people. This is the biggest treasure we have. This means that He governs and directs our lives and will give us overflowing blessings..

b. “They will enjoy great peace”

For the Israelites, the word for peace is “Shalom” (Psalm 37:11). This peace engulfs the whole person. It is total peace for the family, in health, at work, etc. The Psalmist says this peace is for the meek. As Jesus says in John 14:27, it is peace He gives and peace He leaves with us. Being meek is a result of an intimate relationship with Jesus. Knowing that we can enjoy this peace in a world full of conflict should encourage us.

It is very difficult to show meekness. It is not something we can attain on our own. It is a virtue that will flow from our hearts as we surrender our lives to Jesus and let the Holy Spirit work in us. Meekness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and as is true of all fruit, it must grow naturally. As believers following Jesus, we will be more like Him, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can develop meekness in our lives.

Review/Apply: Lead your students in a discussion of the following questions regarding the lesson.

1. What is the difference between being meek and meekness? *The word meek is attributed to a person. The word meekness is used to describe the attitude of the meek person.*
2. Make a comparison between Aaron and Miriam’s complaints, and Moses’ attitude. *Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses. They were envious of his leadership. Moses did not defend himself. To the contrary he interceded on behalf of his sister.*
3. How was Jesus an example of being meek? *He gave up His rights and lived a simple life even though He is the owner of this world. He dealt with all the people types. He gave His life for all, even those who despised Him.*
4. Explain the kind of peace that the Bible offers for the meek. *Peace in all areas of life. Peace that only God can give.*

Challenge: How can we show meekness in our world so that people can see Christ in our lives?



Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness

Lesson

4

Oscar Pérez • Dominican Republic

Objective: That the students make a commitment to promote justice in their family, church and community.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* Matthew 5:6



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blackboard, chalk
- Instructions: Read Matthew 22:15-22. Divide the class into two or three groups and assign the following questions (questions may be repeated or each group can answer all). Who are the main characters? What was the Pharisees' intention? What was the Herodian's question? What was Jesus' response? How is this event a lesson on justice?

Allow the groups to share their responses. Mention that this is a lesson on our civil responsibility and our Christian responsibility. Both are important responsibilities that must be practiced. They are acts of justice.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Five pieces of papers and five different colored markers.
- Instructions: Divide into groups and choose a leader for each group to guide the reading and to present ideas to the class. Ask each group to read John 4:1-15 and identify at least three situations related to justice. They will write them on the papers and be ready to discuss them with the class. 1. *The fact that Jesus is male and the woman is female eliminates gender discrimination.* 2. *The fact that she is a Samaritan and Jesus is a Jew eliminates racial discrimination.* 3. *The fact that Jesus offers her living water is divine justice.*

Connect

Navigate

For centuries, third world countries have suffered injustice. This injustice is manifested through abuse within families, discrimination between the rich and poor, through mishandling natural resources, through bad governments, economic abuse that contribute to a deterioration of human dignity, etc.

This reality is due to a misunderstanding of divine justice and an ignorance of biblical teachings. After describing human behavior in the "last days", which will be "terrible" (2 Timothy 3:1), the Apostle Paul strongly admonishes Timothy to persist in biblical teaching: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Paul wrote that divine justice is made personal through salvation in Jesus Christ, and it is from that experience that we can build justice in the family, community, nation, world.

1. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

a. Blessed

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount making an emphasis on His disciples' character. Their character would be fertile ground in which to cultivate the values expressed in the entire sermon, in the Kingdom. As a compliment to the quality of life of His followers, Jesus encourages them with the word "blessed". It was an expression of motivation and hope to acknowledge who they were and what His disciples would be. The joy and happiness to follow would be incomparable because its source would be God's grace. It is a privilege to listen to Jesus' word "blessed".



As Jesus' disciple, a Christian must view this acknowledgement from the Master as a challenge to be better.

b. Hunger and thirst for righteousness

One of mankind's basic necessities is proper nutrition. Having enough to eat allows us to be healthier and look better. Nevertheless in our poverty-stricken communities, there are many people, created in the image of God, that suffer injustice. These people are hungry, malnourished and need assistance. They need resources to help them get out of their misery. They live anguished lives waiting for a good neighbor to show them favor or the government to help them, but they do not receive the expected resources.

The reality of this analogy is what a Christian should feel about justice: Hunger, absolute hunger for justice; blessed are those who hunger for justice.

Water is another basic need. Water is life because it takes away thirst and avoids dehydration. Who can withstand thirst as well as hunger? Thirst and hunger can produce dehydration and starvation.

Christians must thirst for justice. Only Jesus could quench the Samaritan woman's thirst for justice for her own life (John 4:1-42).

c. Righteousness

For what kind of righteousness should we hunger and thirst? We have mentioned the Samaritan woman was thirsty for justice. She suffered discrimination and prejudice. She had a mistaken view of religion and completely dysfunctional in her marriage relationships. She needed justice, a personal justice that would free her from all her twisted emotions, from her sin, from her deteriorated lifestyle. She was thirsty for redemption and the living water took that thirst away. She was justified by God.

Living justly comes from a life of dedication and commitment. Matthew 25:37-39 indicates that justice must be practiced in favor of those in need: the hungry, foreigners, handicapped, imprisoned. James 1:27 speaks of this and adds, "keep oneself from being polluted by the world". This phrase has an ethical and moral implication. Justice is not behaving as the world does.

Righteousness and holiness are intimately bound together and cannot be separated. The church must be constantly checking its objectives regarding the value of justice and holiness to be, "holy and without any stain or wrinkle..." (Ephesians 5:27). It is every Christian's responsibility to live every day according to Scripture.

2. Blessed and Filled

Blessed and happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled to satisfaction. The beatitudes were spoken for Jesus' disciples. They were not only for the disciples at that time but for today's disciples as well. The question is, why is there so much injustice in the world? Maybe the disciples had yet to grasp divine justice or be liberated from condemnation. Maybe today's disciples are content to be justified by God, but not moved to seek justice in favor of others. If this is true, the Master's message is being disobeyed.

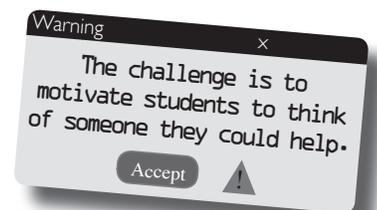
Take a moment to allow the students to examine their character and make necessary changes in order to hunger and thirst for righteousness. As previously mentioned, cultivating righteousness requires unswerving commitment. The results will be visible: Christians will be quenched and filled, completely satisfied due to the re-vindication in their own lives as well as the lives of those around them, as a result of hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

It is important to commit to serving others in order to be blessed and filled. People need to know the purpose for which they were created. We must ask the Lord for forgiveness for our negligence, and ask Him to give us His power and grace to complete the mission according to His will, just as Jesus did.

Review/Apply: Allow time during the lesson for your students to answer the following questions:

1. How do you define justice?
2. How is justice practiced today?
3. Who do you believe hungers and thirsts for righteousness?
4. What could you do to change the reality of injustice for people around you?

Challenge: Say to your class: During this week, look around and write down which of your acquaintances are hungry and thirsty for justice.



Let's Be Merciful!

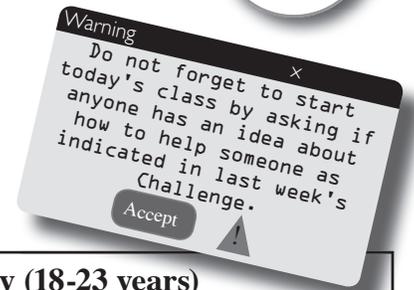
Lesson

5

Juan Carlos Fernández • Cuba

Objective: That the students understand they must be merciful just as God has been merciful to them.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.* Matthew 5:7



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Divide the class in two groups and allow time for each group to prepare a one-minute drama depicting the story of the good Samaritan in a modern-day context. (Luke 10:30-37)

The Samaritan was looked down on by the Jews. Nevertheless, in this story he was the only one who had mercy on his neighbor. Mercy is a beautiful way to put love into practice. Mercy must be expressed in actions as well as words.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Large sheets of paper and markers or a blackboard and chalk
- Instructions: Have the class brainstorm some definitions for "mercy". This should be spontaneous and free of criticism or corrections. Take all the ideas and form one definition.

Connect

Navigate

The word "mercy" is falling into disuse in today's language. It is an uncommon term in everyday conversations. It is likely that it is not heard on a daily basis or may never be heard in schools, or in secular youth circles. However, the most worrying aspect of the matter is not what linguistics refers to, but to the fact that mercy is disappearing from society.

The dictionary defines "mercy" as a virtue that motivates the person to have compassion for the hurts or difficulties of others. In other words, it is the combination of being sensitive to the suffering of other people, together with the intention to help them. An interesting detail is that the person is not obliged to pity and help others, it is a free and spontaneous act of the will, which is not related to the merits of those they help.

1. Salvation as the supreme act of mercy

The tragedy of sin contaminated all of humanity. It is common to hear news of wars, violence, terror and death. Often, those who ignore the Scriptures wonder why God does not intervene to stop such regrettable events. However, the true cause of the tragedy is being underestimated, and this is sin. The seed of evil is sown in the human being and the fruits can be seen without difficulty. The daily news programs are a testimony of that.

It is really wonderful to know that between human disobedience and the justice of the Eternal Father, He rises on a cross, the Son of God. Christ shed his blood as the only acceptable offering to reconcile the human with the divine (Titus 3:5). Mercy shows the compassion of God who moved His heart to rescue His beloved fallen creation. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, gave us life together with Christ (by grace you are saved)" (Ephesians 2:5). The human part with the divine "saved us, not for works of justice that we would have done, but for His mercy, for the washing of regeneration and for the renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Mercy shows God's compassion in rescuing his beloved fallen creation (Ephesians 2:5).

2. We must be merciful also

a. Being merciful with what we have

The words mercy and compassion appear as synonyms in most dictionaries. Sin among other terrible things has sown greed in many human beings. This, in turn, has led to an unequal distribution of wealth, so that the rich are getting richer, while the poor are getting poorer. Much of the world is a sad reality of this condition; inflation and unemployment abound in extreme.

Christians must share what the Lord has given them with those people who have no possibilities to acquire the necessities, such as sustenance and clothing. It is not necessary to be rich to be compassionate. How many pairs of shoes



do you have that are no longer used? When was the last time you wore that dress you did not even remember you had? And what about shirts? Even if we don't have an over-abundance of things, and we don't feel that we can help others, the Word of God shows us that we must give and not precisely because of an abundance (Mark 12:42-44, Luke 3:11). That is precisely where the difference lies between sharing and giving alms. We are not talking about giving what is not good, broken or ugly. We speak of having compassion towards those who, for reasons beyond their control, do not have access to what is necessary.

It is not only in the area of dress or footwear where we can show mercy. A Bible, a book, a notebook, an offering, lodging, care for the sick and many other things can become beautiful expressions of mercy towards others.

b. Being spiritually merciful

I remember something that happened several years ago. A young nurse and I shared the same work shift with some frequency. She knew that I was a Christian. Six months passed and she received the Lord as her Savior. Her first month of conversion was very beautiful. She went from one place to another in the hospital, with a serene smile, talking to all about Jesus. A few days later, in a very serious tone, she told me: "How is it possible that being a Christian for so long, you have not told me about the plan of salvation? Why did you never tell me that Christ loved me and that there is much more in His ways than a religion can offer?" I did not know what to say; I apologized and left somewhat stunned. To this day, I thank God for that conversation. Since then, my attitude has been different. It is not enough for them to know that we are Christians; it is our duty to share the good news of the Gospel with all those people with whom we know. "Go, then, and learn what it means: Mercy I want, and not sacrifice. Because I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13). Sharing of Christ is also mercy "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

In different parts of the world there are various forms of religiosity, and not all are approved by God and His Word. In our context, it is common to see people fulfilling extraordinary promises. Many go on pilgrimages to different places carrying large stones on top of them, others dress with sacks and some arrive carrying chains (literally). In Cuba everywhere, people are dressed in white, wearing countless necklaces and performing expensive rites and sacrifices. Many of those people (although not all) are given to vices of all kinds, their words and behavior leave much to be desired. They believe that if they do what the "santero" (spiritual leader) told them, they will succeed in their plans. Some wonder why they are willing to make such great sacrifices and cannot give their lives to the Lord. The answer is not difficult, they do not want to lead a life of change and commitment. They are not interested in sharing their lives or what they have with others, and they persist in continuing to behave in ways that are often immoral and selfish, for which they will make any kind of sacrifice in order to remain in this condition.

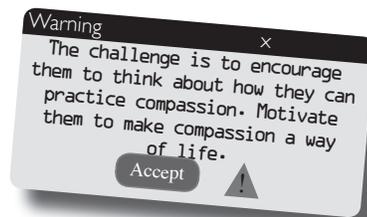
3. Forgiveness as the undisputed work of mercy

Through our daily walk, we receive offenses of various kinds, even from those who are our brothers and sisters in the faith. But regardless, God gave us the commandment to forgive (Luke 6:37; Colossians 3:13). Many times fundamental elements of forgiveness are distorted, leaving out the fact that it is an act of mercy. The greatest example we have is of God who forgives us by His mercy (Psalm 85:6, 86:13,15, Matthew 9:13, Ephesians 2:4-6). Forgiveness is a free and spontaneous act of will towards someone who has done damage. When the decision to forgive is made, a beautiful process of healing begins within us. This process often means that over time the memory is no longer so prevalent in our lives. Unforgiveness is a hindrance to our prayers and also to our relationship with God (Matthew 6:14-15). When we are able to forgive, mercy triumphs over vengeance and judgment (Mark 11:25-26). Although two thousand years have gone by, from the most varied and masterly address given by the Lord Jesus in one of the twelve mountains that are located in the vicinity of Galilee, His words continue as relevant as today's newspaper. His teachings are a challenge for those who hear them, and beautiful promises for all those who put them into practice. It is truly heartening to know that His mercy will last beyond this life (Psalm 23:6).

Review/Apply: Allow time for students to respond to the following questions:

1. Define mercy. *It is the virtue that makes us have compassion for the wrongs of others.*
2. What has been the supreme act of mercy in the history of humanity? *The Son of God, pouring out his blood as the only acceptable offering to reconcile humanity with God.*
3. What has been the supreme act of mercy in your life?
4. How can we show mercy to others? *Sharing the Good News of the gospel with all people we know, and helping those with spiritual and material needs.*

Challenge: Tell your class: Write down anything this week that give you the opportunity to act with mercy. Write your observations every night. Compare the occasions in which you put compassion into practice, with those in which you did nothing. At the end of the week, reflect on each case. Detect and correct, as far as possible, the factors that prevented you from acting, and evaluate how they have influenced your communion with God.



The Pure in Heart

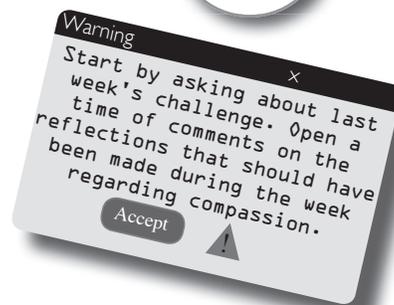
Lesson

6

Eudo Prado • Venezuela

Objective: That the students understand that in order to fulfill God's purpose, one must live according to His commandments.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
Matthew 5:8



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials -A medium size mirror
- Instructions - Read Jeremiah 17:9. Then pass the mirror around and ask each one to describe what they see of themselves. Then ask, "if the mirror would show what is in your heart, would you be willing to share or tell others what you see?" Remind them that people cannot see what is in our heart but God does. God's will is to cleanse our hearts of all sin so that we can fully enjoy His purpose.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: White sheets of medium-sized paper cut out in the shape of a heart, markers in two colors.
- Instructions: Read Matthew 15:19, Mark 7:21-22, and 1 John 1:7. Give two paper hearts to each person and ask them to write on one of them the title "Heart Full of Darkness" and on the other with a marker of another color, "a Heart Full of Light". On the first heart, they should write the different bad attitudes that arise from the heart that was not cleansed by the Holy Spirit and on the other, those kinds of attitudes that arise from a heart that has been cleansed of all sin by the blood of Christ. Give about five minutes for everyone to complete their exercise. Ask each student to carefully observe the two hearts and think about his/her own experience with God and the attitudes that come from the heart. Explain the meaning of the promise of 1 John 1:7.

Connect

Navigate

Just as God created each body and the wonderful physical abilities that others can observe, He also created the inner person. This includes desires, emotions, thoughts, judgment, ability to believe or trust and also, the precious gift of the will, which determines what a person is and does. The Bible refers to that inner being as "the heart". The heart has been affected by sin, preventing it from experiencing the will of God in all its fullness. Therefore, we need God to act within us to change us and conform us to His perfect purpose

1. What is "cleanliness of heart"?

The current world places great emphasis on the personal image. This is reflected in our way of thinking, our convictions and our moral values. However, most of the time this does not happen. What people show to others is not even remotely what really is in their inner being. Generally, our image is determined by the fashion of the moment, the requirements of our social group, of a particular person or of our family. Many times, we think and do things in secret that harm us and others. What the Bible calls in a figurative way, "the heart", in reality is often very different from "the mask" of our personal image.

Perhaps, it has happened to you, that the image you have kept from others, or that which you have shown people for a long time, has collapsed in just a moment, when contradictory attitudes or actions were shown. Even if we try hard, we cannot hide what we have in our hearts.

However, what is inside us is ultimately what counts for God, because that is what we really are. The Bible teaches that God examines what is in the heart. We cannot hide anything from Him! (Jeremiah 17:9)



In the sixth beatitude in Matthew 5:8, Jesus speaks of the “cleansing of the heart”. It is nothing other than the power of God acting on the wellspring of our heart. It is allowing God to govern our lives from the very center of our will. A clean heart is a heart full of truth, with nothing to hide or be ashamed of before God and men, without any greater interest than doing the will of God in everything. It is a way of living differently. Many people feel pressure from the world to live a “double life” and keep a divided heart between worldly affections and God. But you must remember that human pleasures are fleeting (1 John 2:17). That is why you must put your trust in God, believing that it is possible to be cleansed of every carnal disposition.

2. What must be done

The Bible teaches that God created people in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). This image included the likeness in love and the justice of the divine character. It also means that originally God gave people a clean heart. Due to Adam’s disobedience, the human race inherited the natural tendency towards evil. That sinful nature strongly determines our will towards the things that can destroy us. Due to our sinful nature, we are led again and again to disobey God’s good will for us, although deep down we do not want to fail. The Bible compares this condition to slavery (Romans 7:23). This is why, perhaps, we often struggle to change a bad attitude without success.

But the Bible shows the wonderful remedy available to everyone who believes: Allowing the light of God to light the darkness that exists in the heart (1 John 1:7). The cleansing of the heart is the result of the surrender of our will to God. Basically, the word “light” found in the first part of this verse tells us about the nature of God, as it says in 1 John 1:5, “God is light, and there is no darkness in him”. “Walk in light, like he is in light” is only possible when we take the truth as a norm of life. Our life will be full of light when we allow the presence of God to expel the darkness of lying, deceit, pride, or any other sinful disposition from our hearts.

Ask: Why does it cost us so much to be honest with people to tell them about our mistakes? Give opportunity for several to express their opinion. Surely some will agree to respond that they do not freely express themselves to others for fear of rejection. Explain that with God, you can have full confidence that He will never reject them (John 6:37). They should begin by having a sincere approach to God in prayer, what the Bible calls “confession” (1 John 1:9), recognizing the need for the heart to be cleansed, and trusting that He will work the transformation He promised. Confession must be accompanied by a firm decision to obey God’s will for your life, which has already been fully revealed in his Word, the Bible.

3. What God can do

God promised to cleanse our hearts through the sanctifying presence of His Holy Spirit. The end of 1 John 1:7 says that “... the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin.” When we trust Christ, the benefits obtained through His sacrifice become a reality in our lives. The blood of Christ grants us the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of the heart (Hebrews 9:14). God is responsible for removing evil desires from our hearts, changing us from the inside out. This work is done by God through His grace, that is, not by our merit (i.e., by what we’ve done), but by His mercy. Then, once the source of our attitudes (the heart) is cleansed by God, the image we reflect in our character comes from the inner purity we experience by obediently serving Christ every day (2 Corinthians 5:17). The clean of heart are called “blessed” (happy), because only they can truly experience God’s purpose, and know Him in His fullness. No other experience that we can have can be compared to the sanctifying presence of God in our heart. Doing God’s will fills and satisfies our life in a wonderful way. Offer your students the opportunity to approach God, confessing their spiritual need, and interceding for one another to receive the experience of heart cleansing.

Review/Apply: Ask the students to divide up into groups and write a paraphrase of John 1:17. Ask each group to share with the entire class and comment about how they understand the meaning of the verse.

Challenge: Say to your class: Share with me, or one of the youth leaders in our church, the spiritual need you have, or those aspects of your behavior that need to be changed by God. Ask for prayer from two people in the church for your spiritual progress. Also, write down some specific actions that you commit to doing in the pursuit of cleanliness of heart.



We are Peacemakers

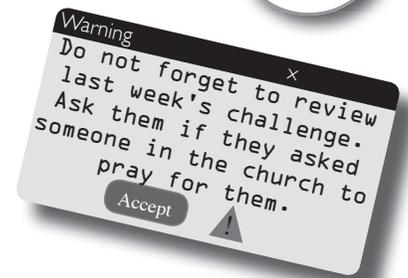
Lesson

7

Walter López • Guatemala

Objective: To awaken the hearts of the students to a clear comprehension of why we must be peacemakers.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* Matthew 5:9



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencils
- Instructions: Divide the class into two groups. Ask the two groups to pretend they are angry at each other. Ask a third person to try to help them reconcile by offering a solution. It is important that the students understand that it is necessary to resolve differences by offering solutions from a Christian perspective.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Newspaper cuttings.
- Instructions: Bring clippings to the class with news about wars and situations that are conflicting and unfair. Ask for their opinion regarding such situations, and what they would do to resolve them. The students must understand the need to be instruments of peace wherever they are.

Connect

Navigate

On one occasion, an evangelical girl commented that war was an invention of God and not of human beings. She justified that war was a form of divine intervention to carry out God's purposes. There is nothing in the Bible that supports this opinion. To think that war is a means by which God manifests Himself goes against the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus chose peace between human beings, and wants us to work for peace too.

1. From whom does peace come?

The word "peace" in the Hebrew is shalom. It is a state of physical, psychic and social well-being that involves the wholeness of the human being. It is not only an inner peace between God and man. This state of peace also manifests itself in a good relationship with others.

The word "justice" plays an important role because peace comes from justice, "And the effect of justice will be peace; and the work of righteousness, rest and safety forever" (Isaiah 32:17). The justice of Jesus brought peace between us and the Father, "Justified then, by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1), and makes harmony possible among human beings.

In the New Testament, the Greek word used for peace is "Eirene", and has a close relationship with the Hebrew word "Shalom", although there are certain differences. Eirene basically denotes the same idea of maintaining an integral relationship of true harmony and tranquility among brothers and sisters.

Many rulers, institutions and world leaders offer peace, but no one can guarantee it as long as there are individual, political or economic interests at the root. This is an adulterated peace; it is a peace that is used as a commodity or a currency of exchange, and is often achieved by harming other people. There are some nations that seek peace through war or governments that use military or police repression to maintain "peace" in the streets. That is not peace, it is fear; it is something contradictory.

On the other hand, biblical peace is a state of well-being, of brotherhood and justice. It does not use violence, and it is not maintained at the expense of other lives. In that sense, for Christians, war is never an option. True peace comes from God. He is the only source of peace and justice. Although the human being strives to achieve peace, only the grace and love of God give the right perspective for the maintaining peace.

The apostle Paul teaches of the peace that comes from God. This peace "exceeds all thought and cares for our hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7 NIV). Peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, "Instead, the Spirit of God makes us love others, always be happy and live in peace with everyone. It helps us to be patient and kind and treat others well, to have trust in God" (Galatians 5:22 TLA), and is cultivated from an experience of Christian piety.

This fruit is contrary to the works of the flesh, such as rivalries, dissensions, sectarianism and envy (Galatians 5:20-21 NIV). Peace constitutes an important pillar in the Christian life because it allows harmony not only between God and people, it also reaches out to the neighbor. It is a fruit that comes from a coexistence between God and people that is reflected in personal relationships within the home, church, work, city, etc. The fruit of the Spirit builds harmony and tranquility among people, while the works of the flesh such as envy, sectarianism and rivalry lead to the destruction and disintegration of homes, churches and even whole nations.

2. Builders of peace

Having peace is not an automatic process. It is possible to think of peace as the tranquility experienced when receiving a response to prayer in the face of a problem or a decision. But the peace that Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount is a peace that is extensive, that is, it is not only personal, but rather communitarian.

Let us recall the demand of Jesus in the same Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:23-24. You cannot be at peace if you have prejudices or lawsuits between brothers. Peace is not something purely personal, that would be selfish. One should be aware that personal peace also represents the peace of others and with others.

In Ephesians 2:14-15, Paul expressed that the integration of Jews and Gentiles into one body is through the sacrifice of Jesus “Because He is our peace, who made one of both peoples, breaking down the middle wall of separation by abolishing in his flesh the enmities ... to create in himself of both a single and new man, making peace.” This new body is the church, the Christian community that reflects a new relationship between human beings, between men and women, races, peoples and nations. That is the peace that the church must embody. It is a peace that does not distinguish between people, that drives to ensure harmony between families, friends and people. For no reason should racial, religious or gender-based hatred be encouraged. Christian responsibility is to build peace everywhere; to be ambassadors of peace; take the gospel as a banner and bring the good news to all those around. Romans 14:19 says, “So, let us follow what contributes to peace and mutual edification.” Paul said, let’s strive to build this peace, do all that is within our reach. It took Jesus’ life to reconcile man with God. The Christian must strive to keep the peace in his home, church and wherever he/she goes. It is a privilege and responsibility!

3. Justice as a platform for peace

At first it was said that peace is closely related to justice. How is this relationship interpreted? Is it valid to support war so that justice arrives and there is peace? Is this a safe path? For the gospel, it definitely is not. While justice is part of peace, at no time did Jesus bring justice through violence. The justice of Jesus was sincere and always had love as an extended arm. Christ’s life, death and resurrection were enough to pay for injustice and build peace. The gospel message calls us to practice this justice. The peace we must proclaim is love - rejection of violence, war and destruction. As evangelical people, we must always opt for peace and harmony among people.

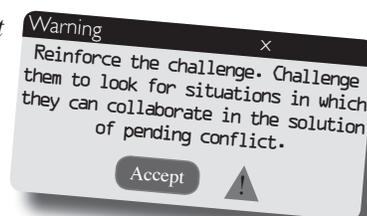
Building peace is not taking judgment into our own hands. Building peace is pointing out injustices and being prophets that speak truth and make our voices heard. We must denounce child abuse, genocide, violence against women, sexual exploitation of children, institutional violence, racial intolerance, etc. But it will never be an option for us to take up arms or anything else that causes damage, however just our cause may be. Our only tool is our voice and our testimony. Jesus spoke against the corruption of the temple and against the abuses of the Pharisees, but He never called for a holy war or an armed revolt.

The justice of Christ makes us aware of the evil that exists, and invites us to fight against it. Being a peacemaker means having a reflective and attentive attitude to injustices. It is also being capable of maintaining harmony. Being peacemakers or builders of peace puts us in a very special position. Matthew says, “they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9). That is the distinction we have for being instruments of peace. We are children of God, and we must reflect the love and purpose of our Father. We are His strong voice in this world. It is important that we consider bringing peace wherever we are. This will be an evident sign that Jesus is in us and we will have the privilege of being called children of God.

Review/Apply: During the lesson give some time to answer the questions and discuss them in class.

1. What does biblical peace mean? *To be characterized by physical, spiritual and social well being.*
2. What allowed the Jews and Gentiles to be one nation? *Christ’s sacrifice*
3. Do you think Jesus would support war or other forms of violence to bring about peace?
4. What is Paul’s exhortation regarding peace in Romans 14:19? *To do everything we can to be at peace with others.*
5. What does God’s Kingdom consist of? *Justice, peace and joy*

Challenge: If there is a conflict situation in the church, family, community or work in which you are involved, try to solve it as soon as possible. Commit yourself to be a peace builder.



Blessed Persecution

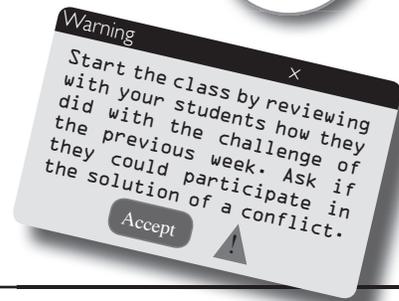
Lesson

Joel Castro • Spain



Objective: That the students understand that as God’s children, we must learn to live in the midst of persecution for the cause of Christ.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Matthew 5:10



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil for each participant.
- Instructions: Divide each sheet of paper in two. On one side write the first part of the Beatitudes studied, and on the other side the promised blessing. For example, on one side, Blessed are the poor in spirit and on the other side, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Ask your students to match them up correctly.

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. The poor in spirit | a. They will see God |
| 2. Those who mourn | b. They will be shown mercy |
| 3. The meek | c. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven |
| 4. Those who are hungry and thirsty | d. They will be comforted |
| 5. The merciful | e. Called the children of God |
| 6. The pure in heart | f. They shall be filled |
| 7. The peace-makers | g. They will inherit the earth |
| 8. Those who suffer persecution because of me | h. The Kingdom of Heaven |

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: A sheet of paper for each group, with the following activity
- Instructions: Divide the class in two or three groups and give a sheet to each team.
- Ask the teams to look up the passages, the main characters and the persecution suffered. Share results with the class.

Biblical Passage	Person	Situation
Genesis 37:23-28	Joseph	Sold by his brothers
1 Samuel 19:9-12	David	Saul tried to kill him
Job 1:7-12;2:3-5	Job	Satan attacked him
Jeremiah 37:15-16	Jeremiah	Thrown in a cistern
Daniel 3:16-27	Shadrach, Meshach Abednego	Put in the fiery furnace
Matthew 14:1-12	John the Baptist	Killed by Herod
Acts 7:58-60	Stephen	Stoned to death
Acts 12:1-5	Jacob	Killed by Herod
Acts 14:19	Paul	Stoned
Revelation 1:9	John	Exiled to an island

These examples help us understand that following Christ can cost us our lives.

Connect

Navigate

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount found in the book of Matthew, not only wanted to exalt the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst, the merciful, the clean hearted and the peaceable; he wanted to give a place of privilege to those who suffered persecution for his sake.

1. Blessed are those persecuted for being righteous

In today’s world, what Isaiah wrote, “... they call good things evil and bad things they call good ...” (Isaiah 5:20) explains the persecution against Christians, because their justice is not approved by all. There are different types of persecution. The following are some types of persecution suffered by practicing justice.

Being righteous implies leading a holy life. The world urges us to take pleasure in things that it sees as normal, such as lying, cheating, plagiarism in exams, entertainment that dishonors the body, or the practice of vices such as alcohol, tobacco, gambling, etc. But we Christians know that as children of God, we should please Him rather than ourselves; this entails not adapting to this world. There are testimonies of many young people who decided to follow Christ and had to face certain types of persecution from classmates or family members. They were often objects of mockery for not taking advantage of living in darkness.

This persecution can be manifested through contempt, gossip and even humiliation; however, the Bible tells us that when that happens, we are blessed. The devil will try to use all his tricks to persecute Christians and make them fall into sin. In Proverbs 1:10 and 15, we find advice on this subject.

Being fair means living a righteous life. The Christian must be set apart from the works of darkness. For that reason, he must live as a true child of God in the midst of a society that takes pleasure in corruption and bribery. You must be patient when you go through situations where protection is not found in the laws of men. The justice of God may take time, but it will arrive.

Young Joseph is an example of perseverance in the face of injustice around him. He was persecuted by his family because he was righteous. In the end God blessed his life for his faithfulness (Genesis 37; 39-41). Another case is found in Luke 18:1-8. This woman was not only at a disadvantage because she was a widow, but also because the judge who handled her case was being unfair. Nevertheless, the widow believed in justice and persisted until she had an answer.

You must follow the example of this widow and always seek justice. As Christians, we are not exempt from suffering because of being righteous or demanding justice. Care must also be taken to discern and be aware of false preachers who preach a gospel free of suffering. On the contrary, they should rest on the promises of refuge by God, and be faithful to Him (John 16:33).

2. Blessed are those who are persecuted for following Christ

Jesus went deeper into the sacrifices of his children. Many may perhaps suffer because of injustice, even a purely moral person may suffer. That is why Jesus said, “Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely” (Matthew 5:11). With the words, “For my sake”, Jesus was personalized in the suffering of his disciples. The term “revile” indicates that love and testimony for Jesus Christ must be loyal even in the face of offenses, defamation, insult and, above all, reproach. The apostle Paul shared his experiences in 1 Corinthians 4:11-14.

On the other hand, Peter said: “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. Indeed, on their part, he is blasphemed, but for you he is glorified” (1 Peter 4:14). People can refer to Christians as sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, alleluia people, etc. The devil wants to defeat the children of God. However, this is part of the Christian life.

Spain, the country where I live, is very difficult to evangelize. As a young man in the church, I was always teased because I was a Christian. However, I prayed for my tormentors, and every time I had the opportunity to speak to them about the Lord, I did it and my perseverance made two of them start coming to church meetings. This is the testimony of many young people today.

Following Christ means being faithful to Him even when persecuted. The persecution can be verbal aggression or even physical punishments we must endure. Currently in many countries, Christians are going through persecution resulting in physical injury and even death. The Bible tells us that Daniel found enemies by worshipping God, and they accused him for praying to his heavenly Father. This led to Daniel being taken prisoner and cast into a den of lions (Daniel 6). In the New Testament, John the Baptist was beheaded for preaching the Word of God; the disciples also gave testimony of their faith until death. The second part of Matthew 5:12 teaches us that the prophets who preceded Jesus are also a great model of strength and courage to be loyal to God.

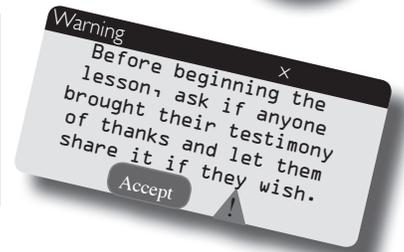
3. Blessed because they will be rewarded.

Jesus encouraged his followers: “Because they are going to receive a great reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12 TLA). The reward is the gain, the reward, the reward acquired after the effort.” All athletes fight for a prize, some at the team level, but others at a personal level. For the Olympic Games, the athletes endure daily training for years in order to achieve the gold medal. Hence, the apostle Paul said, “Everyone who fights abstains from everything; they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible one” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Then, the Christian, the one who withstands suffering for believing in Christ, will have a great reward in the kingdom of heaven. The apostle Peter summarized this topic in 1 Peter 4:15-16. To suffer for Christ is a blessed suffering because if we lose our life because of Him, we will gain eternal life (Matthew 16:25). In Christ, we are not losers; we already have a reward. (Revelation 2:10).

Challenge: Say to your class: After everything we’ve studied, do you feel blessed? What award have you received so far in your life? Review your life and reflect if you have experienced some kind of suffering because of the gospel. During the week, think and write down situations where you have suffered for Christ. If you have not suffered, ask yourself why or write a testimonial of gratitude and share it with the class at the next meeting.

Objective: That the students learn to patiently withstand suffering.

Memory Verse: *And the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”* 1 Peter 5:10



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Posters with the letters of the word “suffering”. News clippings of news about wars, murders, natural disasters, etc.
- Instructions: Form groups and give each one the letters of the word “suffering” mixed up, and a newspaper clipping. They must order the letters to discover the word and then in turn explain according to the news received the effects caused in the lives of the people involved. Guide students to understand that suffering is something that affects all people in all the world, regardless of age, sex or race.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Newspaper clippings regarding wars, murders, natural disasters, etc.
- Instructions: Form groups. Put each clipping in an envelope and ask them to choose one at random. Once they have the news, they should read it and then share with the whole class about the effects produced in the people who went through that situation. Analyze the cause and effect of some situations such as war, drought, natural disasters, etc., and the effect it has on the lives of many people.

Connect

Navigate

Suffering is an emotion, a reaction to something that has caused us pain, and it can manifest itself with crying, depression, sadness, anger, etc. Suffering is the response to a circumstance that directly affects a person and produces a sense of loss, frustration or pain. For example, a disease, a disappointment, or an injustice produces great internal pain. It is not always physical; it is a feeling that invades our being. There are different ways of dealing with this suffering, depending on the situation, the person’s temperament and primarily his/her relationship with God. The importance of dealing correctly with suffering in the Christian life cannot be minimized. Failure to understand its importance can seriously affect a person’s faith.

1. Suffering without Christ or with Christ

Write the following scripture quotes on paper and give them to the students and then ask them to explain each situation: Luke 22:47-48; Luke 22:55-61; Mark 14:50.

Jesus knew that this would happen. In John 16:32-33, we read that Jesus was speaking with his disciples after the Last Supper, just before He was delivered to be arrested and later crucified. Ask: According to the passage, what would Jesus’ situation be? (The disciples left Him alone.)

What did Jesus expect? (Jesus trusted that his Father would be with Him.)

What warning did he give his disciples? (Jesus warned his disciples that they would be scattered and that they would have affliction.)

How did He encourage them? (Jesus encouraged them by telling them to trust because He had overcome the world. Jesus told his disciples that things would not be easy, that they would have to face suffering but they should have the confidence that Jesus would be by their side.)

Jesus conquered, and in Him we can too.

Paul in his letters also encouraged the church to remain steady in spite of the suffering. Ask the students to read 2 Corinthians 1:3-6. How many times is the word “consolation” or a derivative of it repeated in 2 Corinthians 1:4? (In the King James Version, this word appears four times.)

What is the meaning of consolation? (It is to alleviate the pain or suffering of a person.)

Who was Paul's source of comfort? (God)

Why did God console Paul? (God consoled him because He loved him, and so that Paul could comfort others.)

Paul encouraged the church by telling them that despite their suffering, God was faithful and could help them cope with the pain. We are going to face suffering in our lives for many different reasons. Jesus warned his disciples, and Paul encouraged the church. God is aware of every situation that happens to us. In His infinite love, He wants to help and comfort us when we suffer, but it is our decision to carry that burden with Him or without Him. Is there a difference in a believer's reaction and a non-believer's reaction to suffering?

2. Glory in suffering?

Now we will look at some passages to understand what our attitude towards suffering should be. Read Romans 5:3-5. Ask, What was Paul's attitude towards suffering? (Paul was joyful.)

What do suffering or tribulation produce? (Suffering and tribulations produce patience and hope.) Paul faced suffering believing that his faith would grow. He knew that through these difficult situations, God would help him grow and mature in his Christian life.

Ask: Why do you believe that through suffering you can mature in the Christian faith?

Guide them with the following questions:

What could some of our attitudes towards suffering be? (Bitterness, hatred, resentment, lack of faith, hope, anxiety, joy, etc. At the same time, it can be a time to seek God's help, find comfort in reading the Bible, spending more time in prayer, etc. The attitude we take will be the one that will make a difference in our lives.)

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-10. Ask them to write the contrast of the words that appear in those verses. (Troubled but not distressed / In distress but not desperate / Persecuted but not helpless / Demolished but not destroyed / Leading ... death so that life manifests itself.)

Tribulation, problems, persecution or defeat can produce much suffering in the person. However, Paul says that in the midst of that, by the grace of God, not from oneself (2 Corinthians 4:7) we can overcome.

3. Discovering God's purpose in suffering

James 1:2-4 asserts that the trials in our lives produce patience. The word patience can also be interpreted as perseverance. We will achieve this if at all times we seek God with all our strength, trust in Him and hope in His will. That perseverance, firmness, decision to follow faithfully in spite of suffering, is what God wants to produce in our lives through suffering. The most common way to test the purity of gold is by submitting a piece of gold to intense heat to melt it. This will show the mixture of extra chemical compounds that are mixed in with the gold. In this way you can isolate the gold from all the extra "stuff" and have a refined and purer piece of the precious metal. In the same way, it happens in our life when we face situations that cause us suffering. God can help us see in ourselves some impurities that we still have, and by His grace purifies us and cleanses us to make us better. In 1 Peter 5:10-11, we can find four things that God wants to do in our lives. Ask your students to read the passage and find them. Then talk about each of them:

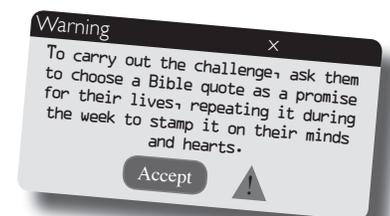
- Perfection: Continue the work that began in our lives. Cleanse us of impurities that prevent us from growing in our Christian life.
- Affirmation: Become stronger, more stable, with confidence in His plan for our lives.
- Strengthened: Make us stronger with a mature faith.
- Establish ourselves: Help us stay faithful until the end.

God knows what we will face in the future. He knows to what extent our faith and our communion needs to be strengthened. The Bible also indicates that suffering or afflictions will be for a time. It may be that while we have them, they seem eternal. But through these trials, God wants to make us stronger, firmer, more stable so that we face what comes safely in his love and grace.

Review/Apply: Read 1 Peter 5:10 and find four things that God wants to do in our lives through suffering. Explain each one:

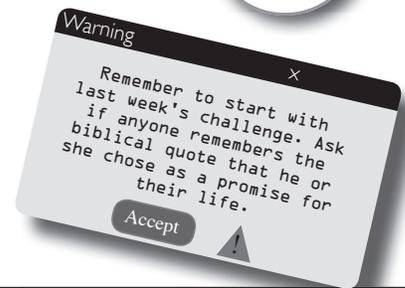
1. Perfect us: Complete His work in us
2. Affirm us: Make us firm in our faith
3. Strengthen us: Make us stronger in our faith
4. Establish us: Help us to remain faithful to the end

Challenge: Present to the Lord in prayer any difficult situation you are facing. Choose one of the biblical quotes studied today and take it as a promise for your life. You can share it with someone you know who is going through a time of suffering.



Objective: That the students learn the importance of equality and rights established for all people, as God has, making no exceptions.

Memory Verse: *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.* James 2:1



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Whiteboard and markers.
- Instructions: Divide the board into two columns and write in each the name of two teams. Students must choose two leaders. Each leader should choose a column and write in them the names of five people who he/she wishes to be part of his team, thinking about an activity they will perform in the class. The names can be repeated on each team. At the end, ask them to mention the reasons why they chose these people (height, strength, intelligence, charisma, etc.). Start the class by commenting that everyone, in some way and at some point, can discriminate against people.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blank sheets, pens and blackboard.
- Instructions: Ask the young people to write their "ideal team" on a sheet, thinking of an activity to be carried out in the class (for example, biblical knowledge contest, relay race). Each "ideal team" must have five members and must be present in the classroom. Then, each one will paste the sheet on the board. Some names will repeat themselves and you can tell them that all people have a tendency to discriminate in our societies. Christians should be aware of discrimination. God is very interested in transforming us.

Connect

Navigate

Discrimination, according to the Dictionary, has two meanings: The first means that we make selective exclusions; that is, that we decide some actions or some people discarding those that do not meet our expectations. And the second meaning refers to giving inferiority treatment to a person or group for racial, religious, political, etc. reasons. Something that the dictionary does not say is that the first can lead us to the second. As Christians, we must take care that our attitudes do not deny the essential message of Christianity: Love. Love is not a theoretical and romantic issue, but the most radical mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Love does not allow favoritism

The Bible says "...believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism" (James 2:1, NIV). Love is one of the attributes of God and was the essential message of Jesus. The actions and decisions of Christ in favor of humanity were directed by the perfect love of God. The nails did not keep Jesus on a cross; but His love for us did (John 3:16). The Bible reiterates that Jesus did not give his life only for some people, for the Jewish race or for those who were close to his land, but for all mankind, "God so loved the world" (John 3:16).

All people are included in that message of love: tall or short of stature, brown or black or white skin, with long hair or shaved, thin or robust, small or large, elderly or young, youth or child or adult, women and men. ... No matter the social, political or economic status, each and every one of us who inhabits this world in the history of humanity (past, present or to come), without exception, is included in the perfect act of love of God. The love of God does not allow favoritism. When God gave the promise to Abram, he said that in it "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). By reading the Scriptures, we can understand that the love of God is not reduced to one nation or tribe, but to all people (Joel 2:32, Romans 10:11-13).

2. The Great Commission

The “Great Commission” given by Christ is also found in John, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). The full revelation of God is through Jesus Christ. All the questions about God, His will, what He wants from us, and what benefits we obtain, are found in Jesus.

What are the requirements that we must meet or fulfill to be saved? All questions are resolved when we see in Christ the perfect revelation of God. God is love, and the most powerful message of Christ is love. The center of the Gospel according to John is the love that Christ offers to all people, regardless of their condition or status.

In John 3, He offers salvation to a recognized Pharisee expert in the Law; in John 4, a woman from Samaria who did not have a dignified reputation in her social context, and in John 8, to a woman who was an adulteress and ashamed for having been caught in the very act of adultery. In all three cases, the essential message is that all people can be saved when they repent and are born again in the love of God, regardless of social, political or religious conditions (conditions that make people discriminate against them). Christ came to remind us that God’s will is love, an inclusive love for all people in society, a radical love that defies evil and ends hatred. Jesus sends us in that same love, which does not allow discrimination.

3. Goodbye to discrimination

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts (Romans 5:5), and that does not allow us to exclude people, much less give them discriminatory treatment. All people were created by God and therefore are the same. If someone still despises a person, it is possible that God’s love has not been fully poured into Him, because that love enables us to love people, to forgive them, to include them and to see them as equals. We are all the same!

This implies, not only that we have the same rights, but that we must also treat others without discrimination: women, men, children, the elderly, adolescents, young people, poor, rich, beautiful or homely, etc. In the Christian life, there should be no differences (Galatians 3:26-29). The Bible also tells us not to have a higher concept of ourselves (Romans 12:3), but to be humble (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5). If any of us still does not live that humility, do not worry! There is a solution: The love of God can be poured out in your heart through the Holy Spirit.

In John’s “Great Commission,” Jesus said that he not only sends his disciples as God had sent Him, but that sending included the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives (John 20:21-23). Undoubtedly, the key to going to the world and accepting the sending of Jesus Christ is the in filling of the Holy Spirit. Going into the world implies going to everyone who needs Jesus. The filling of the Holy Spirit is not something that is reduced to the emotional, but a presence that has to do with a profound change of life; that change of values that God brings to our lives when we follow Jesus Christ closely.

“Receiving the Holy Spirit” at Pentecost (Acts 2), was a special experience for the disciples, an experience that all followers of Jesus would share through all generations. To live in love, a love that does not discriminate against any person, we need the experience of in filling provided by the Spirit of God. It is not with our strength, but in the name of Jesus! Let us be encouraged to pray asking God to fill us with His Spirit, so that He will help us to love all people, not to select only those who suit our interests or belittle people who are not of our culture or who do not share our beliefs.

Review/Apply: Allow time for the students to honestly answer the following questions. Challenge them to make a decision about the topic and take it to the Lord in prayer.

Discrimination

1. What are the most common reasons people show discrimination?
2. What does Jesus Christ expect me to do about discrimination?
3. What am I willing to start to do to show love all people?

Challenge: Tell your class: Think this week about the places you frequent (school, work, university, neighborhood, etc.). Then think about who you relate to and who you do not. Analyze if there is any kind of discrimination towards those with whom you do not relate, and ask the Lord to help you change if needed.

Social Justice

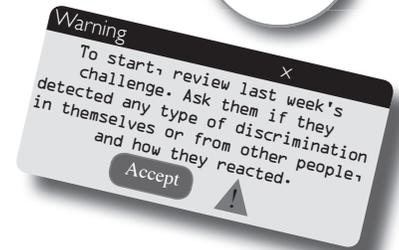
Lesson

11

Walter López • Guatemala

Objective: That the students apply social justice in their interpersonal relationships.

Memory Verse: *Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.* Leviticus 19:15



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Sweets, or gourmet food to share with the class.
- Instructions: Deliver the food you brought only to one part of the class. It can be only women or men or minors or elders. Then ask them to eat what was given to them. Finally ask them to share how they all felt. At the end of the comments share what you brought with the rest of the class.

It is important that the students understand that there must be equality in everything we do.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Whiteboard and markers.
- Instructions: Ask the class to write words on the board that come to their minds when they hear the words “social justice”. Make a list on the board of the main social problems in your community that may be caused by injustice. The students must understand the need to be aware of the injustices surrounding them.

Connect

Navigate

Social justice is a modern concept. It was developed in the context of the industrial society that had as one of its negative effects the polarization of classes. This model of society opened the gap between those who have a lot and those who have very little. The concept of social justice refers to the attempt to balance the distribution of resources and goods in a society. It is true that social disparities have been a constant throughout history. However, before this concept of social justice was used, there was only talk of justice. The social has to do with the modern concept of society and was not used until the nineteenth century. More than a term in the Bible, is a state of equality among human beings. God Himself is just and His revelation to Israel bestowed a series of norms and behaviors that reflect His justice. These norms reflect what is now understood as social justice.

1. The justice of God

The revelation of God’s justice to Israel is visible throughout the Old Testament. In Leviticus 19:10-18, there are a series of laws that God gave to the people to direct their relationships. In them we can see some basic issues that would apply very well to the concept of social justice as we understand it today. In this passage, there are several negative practices that are unfair from the divine perspective. Oppression, robbery, retention of the worker’s salary (v. 13), discrimination of people with different abilities (v. 14), corruption of judicial processes and favoritism in courts (v. 15), murmuring and the attempt against the life of the neighbor (v. 16), are only some examples of the injustice against which the Lord warns. In Isaiah 58:6-7, the prophet speaks that the true fast is to break the chains of injustice, release the burdens of oppression, let the broken ones go free, break bread with the hungry, provide shelters for the poor and clothe the naked. Although these passages were written many centuries ago, they are still valid anywhere today. These rules of coexistence are useful for establishing social justice.

In the New Testament, we find that Jesus established behaviors that fostered justice among his disciples. In Matthew 20:25-26, after the petition of James and John, Christ taught them that the rulers of the nations rule and the great exercise authority (v. 25), but he warned them that among them it should not be so, but he who wanted to become great would have to be a servant of all (v. 26).

The logic of the world works in the opposite direction to the gospel. In the world, power and domination lie in money and in the control of laws. In many cases, justice is subordinated to these interests causing the well-being of some and the misery of many. Although justice in the terms proposed is a cross-cutting issue in the Bible, many Protestant groups are far from retaking the prophetic attitude that evokes that

justice. That is, we are far from denouncing the injustice that beats strongly in our social environment. We adopt a spiritualist attitude to social problems, waiting for a miracle to happen without moving a finger. God will not move a single finger to solve something that is in our hands.

2. Prophetic culture

The prophets constantly called for repentance of unrighteous behavior. This repentance was not just a conversion of the heart, it was an integral conversion that included social relationships. The case of the prophet Amos is fascinating. He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (Amos 1:1).

At that time, Israel enjoyed economic and political prosperity (4:11, 5:12 and 8:4-6). However, the prosperity was based on the injustice and undermining of the poor. In these passages we find a list of injustices. Oppression, undermining, corruption of justice to the detriment of the poor, exploitation, swindling, and deception are some behaviors that Amos pointed out. Seeing this, God intervened for justice and the cause of the poor and said, "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four I will not revoke his punishment; because they sold for money to the righteous, and to the poor for a pair of shoes. They trample on the dust of the earth the heads of the helpless, and twist the way of the humble" (Amos 3:6-7a). This is a pronouncement that God made in a socially unjust situation.

The reality of our countries is not different. As Christians we are called to cultivate and proclaim a prophetic attitude. It is our duty to treat people fairly and fight for them. There are social problems such as exploitation, child trafficking, mistreatment of the migrant, rich and powerful impunity with pockets full of money, owners of organizations and companies that undermine the environment, and the worker's rights. There are companies that make illicit deals and surpass environmental and labor standards in order to obtain more profits. This is injustice and a Christian attitude must question that state of social decomposition and begin to build a prophetic culture.

3. Justice is the fruit of our faith

Someone could argue that this confrontational attitude to injustice is very particular to the Old Testament, that now things are different with the new covenant. But in the New Testament we find some guidelines for assuming a prophetic attitude. Justice is a fruit that results from our walk with Christ. We cannot pretend to be his disciples if we do not act like him. James, who walked closely with Jesus and learned to behave the same way, wrote to the church regarding the importance of reflecting our faith through works. This is not only about charity foundations, it is about acting proactively. It is identifying with the suffering of others as Jesus did with us. James exhorts us to have a fair and equal treatment among those around us. In his epistle he highlighted the unjust attitude of the rich (James 2:1-6). Why insist on this polarity between rich and poor? First, because this is a biblical issue and secondly because this social polarization is the root of social injustice. This is a fact that has existed since before Christ was physically among us, and we have to talk about it and do something about it.

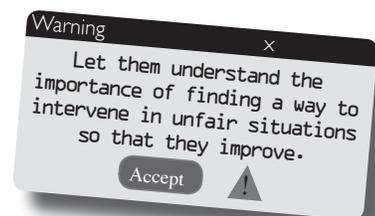
4. Jesus, knight of justice

Since the birth of Jesus, it was possible to observe His justice and His message about injustice. In Luke 1:52-53, the good news of the gospel is enunciated. In the context of the birth of Jesus, the gospel says, "... removed the powerful from the thrones, and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with goods, and he has sent the rich away empty." Jesus had full identification with the poor, and even the message of his birth was received by humble shepherds. In his public appearances, Jesus announced that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed Him to proclaim freedom and recovery for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Ask: How will we practice social justice? Is there anything we can do in individual ways? Is there anything we can do as a group?

Review/Apply: Have your students respond to the following questions and discuss as a class.

1. What are the sins for which God blames Israel according to Amos 5:12? *To flout the righteous, bribery, and to ignore the cause of the poor.*
2. How should the disciples of Jesus treat each other? *Serve each other*
3. How can the distinction in the treatment of people in the church be avoided? *Greeting and treating everyone equally regardless of their appearance or social status.*
4. How would Jesus treat a needy person who came to church? *He would welcome them with open arms and pay attention to them.*
5. How could you work as a class of young people to build social justice? *Treat each other fairly, men and women. Respecting different points of view and helping others in their activities and tasks.*

Challenge: Say to your class: During this next week, pay attention to what happens around you. If you notice an injustice in your school, place of work, family or church, look for a way to intervene so that this situation improves. Share in the next class what happened.



Christians and Civil Law

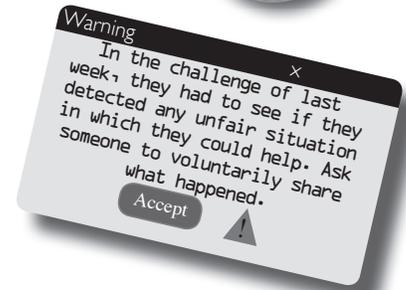
Lesson

12

Leticia Cano • Guatemala

Objective: That the students respect the law and legal authorities because it pleases the Lord.

Memory Verse: *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.* Romans 13:1



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Ask two or three young people to represent the following case: "The owner of a business does not give an invoice in order to evade taxes. Upon discovery, his business is closed and he is forced to pay a fine." Ask the class to comment briefly on the case. Breaking the law has unpleasant consequences.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Instructions: Ask two or three young people to represent the following case: "A young man goes to church driving a vehicle without a driver's license. A policeman stops him. The young man offers him a bribe to let him go, but the policeman consigns him to the courts, where they give him a significant fine for trying to bribe a police officer and for driving without proper permission." Give some time for comments. Breaking the law has unpleasant consequences.

Connect

Navigate

1. The responsibility to obey God

Designate a student to read Luke 20:19-26. The time setting is the first century of the Christian era, and the Jewish nation was under the power of the Roman Empire, which governed and taxed them. Jesus gave a clear lesson on the responsibility of respecting the rules of coexistence socially and religiously. We honor God by fulfilling our responsibilities. When the spies of the Pharisees asked him if it was right to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, the Lord emphatically declared that it was necessary to comply with the rules established by the authorities that governed the country. Christianity is an integral lifestyle of righteousness, no matter where we are (at home, at school, at work, on the road, everywhere). Furthermore, being a Christian is not justification for not complying with the norms and laws of each country, and being a good citizen brings glory to the Lord. The Lord Jesus taught that just as it is necessary to obey and respect human laws, it is indispensable to obey God. Social laws regulate human coexistence. God's laws regulate our relationship with God, and this is shown in our interpersonal relationships. The Bible says that God likes obedience more than sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:22).

Sometimes we submit to the authority of the boss, the teacher or the father because there is an external motivation (salary, privilege, permission to leave, etc.), not because we are convinced that we must do it. Our obedience should not be motivated by personal interest or keeping up appearances, but by our desire to be pleasing to God and respectful of others (Ephesians 6:6 NIV).

2. The authorities that God established.

The existing authorities in any field must give an account for the authority they have received. When we choose our authorities, we are responsible for making a reasonable choice. Some of the authorities that govern us are not by our choice (parents, teachers, leaders). In both cases, we have the responsibility to respect them, although sometimes we do not agree with their leadership.

a. Purpose of having authorities

God arranged authorities in order to establish order and respect in the different social groups. Can you imagine living in a place without authorities? It would be total chaos. It would produce what we know as anarchy which is the rejection, opposition or ignorance of a legitimately established authority. At present

we live in an atmosphere of anarchy in different spheres of society, which sometimes begins at home. When parents do not clearly establish their authority and allow their children to refuse to obey them, this attitude takes root and manifests itself within the family and beyond. The anarchic individual, in opposing authority, is in essence opposed to the authority of God. Moreover, if the parents themselves are an example of breaking the rules, surely their children will learn to do the same.

At the entrance to an amusement park, there was a sign that said, "Children under six years: \$ 3.00. Children over six years: \$ 5.00". The manager asked a father about the age of his two children. He replied that the little one was three and the big one was six years old. The doorman scolded him saying, "Why did you not say that one was three and the other five? You would have saved some money and nobody would have known!" The father replied: "But my children would know it and so would God."

Have you met friends or neighbors who do not respect the authority of their parents or teachers? Disobedience and defiance is more evident today than some decades ago, because we have failed to teach obedience and respect at home. Susana Wesley recommended the following, "To form the minds of children, the first thing to do is to overcome their rebellious will and bring them to an obedient character." The earlier in your life the better. The world considers as kind and indulgent those whom I would call cruel parents, because they allow their children to have destructive habits they know they will have to overcome later (<http://devocionalescristianos.org/2006/06/grupoministeriomujer-los.html>).

b. When the authorities are unfair

The Bible says that the authorities are at God's service. This phrase is difficult to accept when our civil authorities are often involved in illicit activities, in corruption and even in organized crime. How can we think that they are at the service of God? The civil authorities have been established to ensure compliance with the law and the correct delivery of Justice. Each individual must give account to his superiors and to God (Colossians 4:1 NIV). If the person who has authority misuses it, that does not justify our breaking the law. The sin of another does not justify ours. He who sows injustice will also reap it.

3. The retribution of our acts

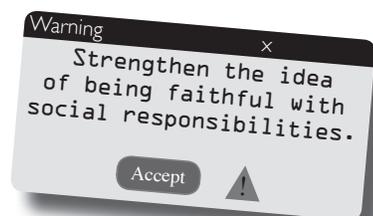
Retribution is a natural law, it is the law of cause and effect. The Bible teaches us the law of sowing and harvesting (1 Samuel 2:30). When he who has authority is defied, he has all the power to apply the punishment (Romans 13:4-5). If we resist obedience to authority, we will have to suffer the consequences. The Bible tells us that if we do wrong, we will receive condemnation (Romans 13:2), but if we do the right thing, we will receive a reward.

Review/Apply: Allow time for your students to honestly answer the following questions and then motivate them to make a decision to bring the subject to God in prayer. Questions for group discussion. Divide the class in groups of 5 people to discuss the questions in 5 minutes. Then exchange one member from each group to share their opinions with the other group and come back to discuss for another 5 minutes. Then write the answers of all.

Read the following biblical passages (Ephesians 6:5-8 and Colossians 3:25 and 4:1) and answer the following questions:

1. If a person with authority is not Christian, should we obey him? Yes or no and why. *Yes, we must obey, because in doing so, we make it clear that we are Christians.*
2. If the actions of the authority are unfair, can we do the same? *No. The injustice of the officials does not give us license to act in the same way.*
3. Frequently, government officials steal money from the state/country. In that case, should we pay taxes? *Yes. We must always pay our taxes, "... give to Caesar what is of Caesar." Then we cannot require the services for which we have not paid, such as health and education, etc.*
4. If the existing authorities have been established by God, is God responsible for some officials trampling on citizens, abusing their power? *No, God is not responsible for the misuse that people make of the received authority. Everyone makes use of their will to act and from this they will have to render an account and stick to the social as well as the spiritual consequences.*

Challenge: Tell your class: Talk to your parents about today's topic. Ask them how the taxes that citizens pay are invested. You must decide in your heart to pay your taxes in the place where you live and also contribute with your tithes and offerings for the support of your church.



A Modern Family

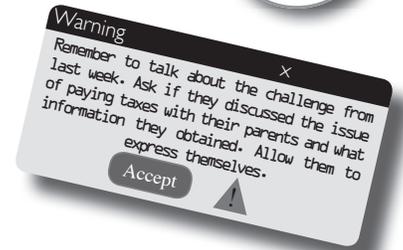
Lesson

Natalia Pesado • USA

13

Objective: That the students understand the characteristics of a healthy family.

Memory Verse: *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.* Romans 15:1-2



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: One sheet of paper for each student and colored pencils.
- Instructions: Give each student five minutes to draw a picture of his/her family. At the end, allow them to explain their work of art to the rest of the group.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk, or large paper and pencil.
- Instructions: Divide the board into two equal parts by making a vertical line in the center and writing in large letters “FUNCTIONAL FAMILY” on one side and “DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY” on the other. Ask the students to describe some characteristics of each concept and write them under each title. It is likely that the answers on one side are the opposite of the other.

Connect

Navigate

We can define family as a group of people who are related to each other by blood ties or not, and who generally live under the same roof. In today’s lesson, we will study some dynamics that occur in families and what the Word of God advises us about family living.

The family unit is the basis of society and of all humanity. Within the family, not only physical existence begins, but also the formation of a children’s temperament and personality. The family’s influence cannot be ignored. On the one hand, this is wonderful because we can learn what it means to be loved unconditionally, what is to share material things and also unforgettable moments of joy and fun. The family can be an excellent support group in difficult moments of illness, loss, stress or affliction. However, we cannot ignore that there are families in which the positive qualities mentioned above are absent, and this can cause many emotional needs such as a lack of being satisfied, low self-esteem, and physical, emotional, psychological, mental and spiritual difficulties.

1. What is a dysfunctional family?

The concept of “dysfunctional family” is new; it originated at the beginning of the evolution of modern social sciences (for example, psychology and sociology). It is defined as that which does not fulfill its purpose of satisfying the physical, socio-emotional and moral-spiritual needs of its members. In the Bible we find an example of a family with such characteristics that caused serious problems to its members.

Genesis 25:27-28 tells the story of twin brothers named Esau and Jacob. Although twins, these two boys were very different from each other. Esau was “skillful in hunting, a man of the field” (Genesis 25:27), and we can assume that he was probably a very physically active and determined young man who from an early age spent time outside his tent (the typical dwelling of those times) with the men of the family learning and practicing the secrets of hunting. On the contrary, “Jacob was a quiet man, who dwelt in tents” (Genesis 25:27); with this description we can assume that Jacob was calmer than his brother in terms of energy, and preferred to stay inside. He learned to do housework, cooking, cleaning, etc. In these verses we are not told that among them there would be rivalry due to their different personalities. However, verse 28 teaches us what may have been the root of the problem: “And Isaac loved Esau ... Rebecca loved Jacob more.”

The parents in this family showed favoritism, and this caused problems between the brothers. Every son and daughter wants to be loved by both their mother and father. Feeling rejected by a parent can cause insecurity and low self-esteem. Also, when there is favoritism, jealousy and envy grow in children’s hearts. Genesis 27:6-19 tells how Rebecca, due to her feelings of favoritism, sinned against God by lying. The blessing of the

birthright was the right of the elder brother of a family. He was to receive more than half of the material goods as an inheritance after his father's death. Rebecca's lie symbolized disrespect and loyalty to her elderly husband, lack of motherly affection for her first son Esau, and a negative example for her son Jacob. Although Rebecca and Jacob's trap worked, it brought sadness and disunity to her family.

2. What are consequences of a dysfunctional family?

In Isaac and Rebecca's family, favoritism and deception had serious consequences for parents and children. Genesis 27:41 says that Esau "hated" his twin brother, and set out to kill him. Jacob had to flee to escape his brother's anger (Genesis 28). Hatred, caused in a certain way by the mother, caused conflict and separation from the family. Due to a lack of wisdom, Isaac and Rebecca lost their youngest son. Isaac probably experienced anger and distrust against his wife due to the deception, fear and concern for the present and future well-being of their children, and finally impotence and guilt for not having prevented the situation. Rebecca probably experienced fear because of Isaac's anger and Esau's threats of vengeance, tension, anguish, and loneliness because of his conflict with Isaac and the loss of Jacob, as well as guilt and regret.

In Genesis 27:46, it says that Rebecca even had certain suicidal thoughts when she thought about the possible future of her son Jacob. Esau lost his brother, who could have been a great help in times of difficulty and with the responsibilities of the house. Probably after his anger and thoughts of murder, he also felt concern for the welfare of his younger brother and sadness. Esau may have suffered from insecurity and low self-esteem when he realized his mother's plan with Jacob to take away his birthright. Finally, Jacob, although he won the birthright, had to live alone and did not have the love and the company of his family. He was afraid to meet with his brother, and lived in a distant land with an foreign family. He had to work for sustenance, instead of having his needs taken care of by his father..

3. How can we have a healthier family?

A functional family is one that "works" and fulfills the purpose of meeting needs, especially the emotional needs, of its members. The functional family should not be understood as a family that never fails nor has disagreements. This state of perfect harmony is impossible in a family composed of finite and imperfect human beings. A functional or healthy family is characterized by having the ability to love in a way that compels them to act and to work to restore relationships when faults are committed, and the emotional needs of the family members are met most of the time. This kind of love is only possible with the presence of God and his Holy Spirit in our lives. There are two specific characteristics that we can highlight in functional families.

The first is respect or appreciation among the members of the family despite the differences that may exist between them (personality, physical appearance, or individual preferences and tastes). When families are able to understand and accept differences and appreciate individual qualities, they can form an effective team. Each member will collaborate with their personal characteristics to form a strong and effective family. We can imagine that if Isaac and Rebecca had appreciated both children for their individual qualities, the children would have felt special and unique, they would have strived to give their best for the family, and the family would have remained united and in a better psychological and even economic situation.

Secondly, forgiveness is the key characteristic for a healthy family to overcome the natural problems in interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness is the decision not to continue blaming a person for the damage caused, and not allowing resentment to hurt our heart. Forgiveness is freedom for the two parties involved.

In Genesis 33:4, we can read the wonderful story of the reconciliation of Jacob and Esau. Finally, forgiveness allowed the story to end "as if nothing had happened". "...and Isaac breathed out the spirit, and died, and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and Esau and Jacob buried his sons" (Genesis 35:29). We see that both brothers experienced the death of their father in harmony and mutual support. It is easy to imagine the joy that Isaac felt to see them reunited once more.

Review/Apply: Ask the students to fill in the following with ideas of how to implement healthy traits in their own families. (Adapted from Creative Meetings, Youth Specialties)

What Can I do:

- To show my family appreciation ... *Write a note of thanks to my mom for making me dinner, etc.*
- To forgive someone in my family ... *Treat my dad with respect even when he doesn't let me go out with my friends, etc...*

Challenge: Ask your class: What is your perspective of your family? Do you think you can be different to improve some aspect of your family? Remember that the idea of the family was born from the very heart of God and that He longs to help you enjoy yours to the fullest. During this week, think about the problems that exist in your family, and what you can do to solve them. If you feel that everything is good, wonderful. Regardless, talk with your family about it.

Peace in the Storm

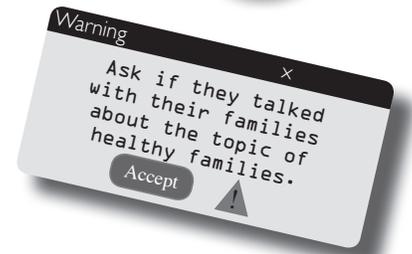
Lesson

14

Gabriela López • Mexico

Objective: That the students understand that any crisis in a believer's life will help in their development and spiritual growth because there is hope that God will sustain them every moment.

Memory Verse: *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.* John 16:33



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper, markers or pencils.
- Instructions: Form two groups and ask them to draw two or three images that represent crisis situations (illness, unemployment, failed exams, etc.). Then each group will show the images and the opposing team will try to decipher the image. This dynamic will help students really meditate and recognize crisis situations.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Paper, pencils, tape to stick the paper on each participant's back.
- Instructions: Ask each student to write down a situation that represents a crisis (divorce, unemployment, illness, etc.). Collect them and then stick a paper on each student's back, without them being able to see the writing on their backs. Ask them to have a conversation with their classmates about the crisis situation written on their partner's back. At the end, each student must deduce what is written on their own back. This dynamic will allow young people to think about the crisis situations that they or other people around them may face.

Connect

Navigate

1. Facing the crisis

Crises are linked to changes in life. Some changes are inevitable, others occur due to external situations that a person cannot control. We cannot control the stock market, banks, entrepreneurs, unemployment and poverty, or stop an economic crisis. We cannot foresee death or illness, but we can decide how to face those situations. We can never do it alone without a plan of action, and of course, without God.

Tell this imaginary story, "The Christian parents of a young man decide to separate after 25 years of marriage. The situation is sad and painful. It gets worse because the father who provided for the house leaves the home, so the economic resources decrease. The young man has to leave school and work in order to help with the maintenance of the home. They must also move to a much smaller house. This young man only sees abandonment and disappointment in his loved ones. His faith wavers because everything has changed and it is not for the good!"

From the psychological point of view, this young man could fall into a depression that could shake his faith. He may even look for instant moments of happiness in alcohol or drugs. He could harbor feelings of anger and rage against his father. Discuss this case with the students.

The reaction to these crises depends on each person. The common attitudes in these crises are despair, suffering, disappointment, frustration, indifference, apathy, depression, etc. These crises break the expectation of stability that people seek. At a certain point this is normal, but it should not become a permanent condition. The Bible has examples of people who faced crises without God, and the results were not good.

The first crisis we will mention is King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:5-15. Saul and his army were threatened by the Philistines. Due to his state of despair, Saul made wrong decisions and disobeyed God. He visited a fortune-teller who predicted that he would die the next day because of the attack of the Philistines. Saul was

far from God and he had no hope.

Another example is found in Jeremiah 38:17-28. Babylon invaded Judah and besieged Jerusalem. The Jews were enslaved by the Chaldeans. The king of Judah, Zedekiah, did not trust in God. When Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans he despaired and faced failure and defeat.

2. Facing the crisis with Christ

Crises are inevitable, but when a person clings to the hand of God, there is hope. God makes the difference, and our lives take on greater value and meaning even in the midst of crises. God does not send crises, but allows them. Many times they are the result of a selfish decision, and the consequences affect other people. God in His omnipotence allows these situations, but this does not mean that He has abandoned us. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, it says “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind; And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can resist, but when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” God allows difficult moments, but at the same time He tells us the way out and gives the support to continue.

Job, is an example of a victorious life in the midst of difficulties. The book of Job is a guide on how to face adversities by remaining faithful and recognizing God as the sustainer of the universe and human life. Job taught that absolute trust in God is the best option. The Christian can face the crisis in two ways: 1) by blaming God and moving away from Him. Or 2) By holding on to God for comfort, advice and learning from the situation.

I remember a very difficult moment in my life and how for more than two years I coped with this crisis in my own way. I justified my anger and frustration. I believed that I deserved to keep all that pain. I refused to put those feelings in God’s hands. It was when I broke down before God and put everything in His hands that I felt totally free. The situation had not changed, the crisis continued, but God was with me so my heart and my vision changed. The pain diminished, forgiveness and joy took hold of me every day, and that was thanks to God. In the midst of a crisis, you can recognize that God is in control and that you can go to Him at all times (Psalm 71:3). In the midst of the crisis, God takes care of his children, and His presence and protection always remain. God is in control of everything, and is willing to comfort, heal and give victory. It can be affirmed that “to those who love God, all things work together for good, that is, to those who are called according to their purpose” (Romans 8:28).

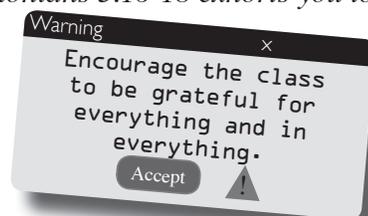
3. Fruits of crisis in the Christian

After a time of crisis, the person can be seriously affected and have feelings of bitterness, pain, anger, hatred. If the person trusts God during a crisis, the end result may be victory, hope and joy. When you recognize that God has your life in His hands, you can cope with the crisis and say, “If God is with us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Maintaining that hope will give victory in the midst of suffering because we trust in God. The crisis is a means to grow and strengthen our character. The difference is that the Christian has hope even if he lives in a world where there is a lot of suffering. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, it says that permanent joy in God is maintained by two actions: Praying without ceasing and giving thanks to God in everything. In the midst of a crisis, you can have peace by recognizing these two principles.

Review/Apply: You can ask the questions as you go through the class and allow them to write down the answers or allow time for them to respond at the end.

1. Why do changes cause crisis? *Because it goes against the expectation of stability that people always seek. Changes threaten the tranquility of the known and the desire to keep everything under control.*
2. What causes a crisis situation in a person? *When stability is affected due to changes, the person feels frustration, pessimism, despair, discouragement. This prevents him/her from seeing a possible solution.*
3. Why is it important to recognize the sovereignty of God in the midst of a crisis? *Because recognizing that God has everything under control can be affirmed, joyful and victorious. God must be sought in prayer and in thanksgiving.*
4. Do you believe that the joy that God gives is before or after the crisis? *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 exhorts you to be joyful and always in prayer ... not only during a crisis.*

Challenge: Tell your class: It’s time to say thank you. During the week, make a list of 10 things that God has given you and that give you happiness. Also write briefly about a crisis situation that you have faced and that God sustained you and gave you the victory. Say a prayer of thanksgiving.



Objective: Motivate the students to intercede for their neighbors because it is God's plan that people be saved.

Memory Verse: *Who then is the one that condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life— is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.* Romans 8:34



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Sheet of paper and pencil.
- Instructions: Using the acrostic technique, write each letter of your name (vertically) and a prayer of intercession for those friends or family members who do not know Christ. Example:
 - **M**y king of kings and Lord of Lords, Savior
 - **O**ver all. I want to ask you for my friends who do
 - **N**ot know Christ, including Stephen, Marie, David, and Raquel. Please do not let
 - **T**hem stay without knowing you. Help me to share the message of your salvation with them. May
 - **E**ach one can come to you soon. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.After writing the acrostic, help them understand that it is not so difficult to intercede for others.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Sheet of paper, pencil.
- Instructions: Ask each student to think of a person he knows that does not know Christ. When everyone has someone in mind, everyone will pray for that person. When you finish praying, ask them to write a letter. This letter will be addressed to the same person who was prayed for. Encourage them to mention in the letter that they thought about him or her during the Sunday School class, and that they were and will be praying. Tell them God loves them and has a special plan for their life. The letter should not be extensive. This will help the students lose the fear of sharing the gospel with their friends who do not know about God. It will also be easier for them to intercede in an intentional way for those who do not know about Him.

Connect

Navigate

The word “intercession” is a word that is commonly used among people in the church. There are evenings of intercession, times of intercession, a team of intercessors who have the task of interceding for sinners, friends, the pastoral family, the Sunday School teachers, the poor, etc. But what does it mean to intercede? One dictionary says that interceding is “To speak in favor of someone or to rid him of an evil.” This definition reminds us of Jesus’ mission on earth.

1. It is for them.

Jesus was clear about his mission on earth, “Call sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:30-32). Sin exists and there are many people who are immersed in it. The society in which we live today has temptations that affect all people. Temptation attracts sin and consequently distance us from God when we sin. The Word of God is clear when it says that we have all sinned, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and “The wages of the sin is death ... “(Romans 6:23a). So, we can conclude that those friends and family we love so much, if they do not repent of their sins, cannot be saved and will not be in the glory of God but in eternal death. What can we do?

2. Asking for the lives of sinners.

Abraham, called the Father of the Faith, in Genesis 18:16-33 gave an incredible example of what can



be done for those who are not in God's will or do not know him. The Bible mentions that Sodom and Gomorrah were cities that were in sin and consequently, were far from God. Sodom and Gomorrah were cities located in the territory of the Canaanites and are remembered for their social and sexual perversions. The prophet Ezekiel in 16:49-50 mentions that it was a sinful city with excess of idleness, did not help the afflicted and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. From this place comes the term "Sodomite" to designate people who practice sexual aberrations. Abraham, remembering that his nephew Lot lived in that city, was encouraged to speak with Jehovah and intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah. He asked God to free these cities from imminent destruction. Abraham was speaking in their favor so that they would be okay and be spared from the destruction. When Abraham interceded, Jehovah heard him.

That is the power of intercession. That is the power of prayer. When one approaches God and speaks to him, God listens and works in the life of the one who prays and those who need it, even those who do not yet know him. People who live in sin need Christ, and if something is not done for them, they will face the final judgment without Christ. The Bible describes it as a time of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 22:13).

For this reason, we must intercede for those who do not know Jesus and those who need to know His Word, His love, and His salvation. People need to know that sin will only lead to condemnation. They also need to know that there are people who love them and want good for them. The Christian's desire is for Christ to enter their lives cleanse them from sin and all evil, and grant them a new and eternal life. Romans also mentions that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23b).

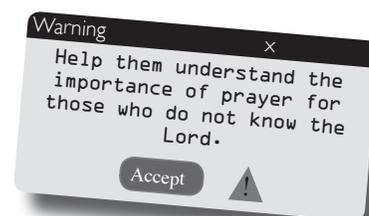
3. God still forgives.

God is still willing to forgive the sins of those people who, believing in Him, confess their sins and accept Him as their Savior (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah did not take advantage of an opportunity and were destroyed by fire, but now humanity has an opportunity. What Jesus Christ came to do was an intercessory work, a redemptive work. He came to die for the sins of all humanity and to receive the punishment in humanity's place. Christ's death freed humanity from punishment and granted salvation. With His blood, He redeemed sins and granted eternal life.

How wonderful to know that! Jesus came to this world to INTERCEDE for me. He came especially to do me good; to get rid of evil, because He loves me. The most interesting thing is that even after His sacrifice, He continues to intercede for each of us before the Father as mentioned in Romans 8:34, "Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died; even more, he who also was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

As disciples of Jesus, you can and should do the same. You can intercede and ask God for friends, family, neighbors, co-workers or schoolmates that do not know Him. You can intercede for people that you appreciate and would like to be free from eternal evil. If they confess their sins, "He is faithful and just to forgive them and deliver them from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Today, every person who has a personal experience with Christ is a bearer of God's message. You can intercede for your friends, pray for them, visit them, talk to them about the Word, disciple them and give them an example of how to live in holiness. Maybe one of them is in a difficult situation and cannot find the way out. "Your enemy, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The intercession of believers leads to opportunities for salvation. People can be saved and have joy and peace and live eternally with Him..

Challenge: Tell your class: Prepare a list of 10 friends or family members who do not know Christ as their Savior. Think of creative ways to help you remember to pray for them every day during the week. It can be a bookmark, a schedule, the alarm on your watch or cell phone, etc. Ask God in prayer for help in fulfilling this mission during this week.



Don't think too much of Yourself!

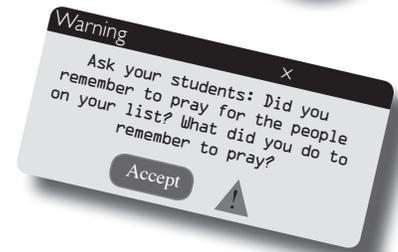
Lesson

16

Elimelec Juantá • Costa Rica

Objective: To challenge the students to think about their talents with humility, and to use them in God's service.

Memory Verse: *For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.* Romans 12:3



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blackboard, markers, or chalk, sheets of paper and pencils.
- Instructions: Hand a sheet of paper to each student and ask them to write a list of the positive qualities they possess. Mention some qualities to give them an idea of what you are asking for. You can ask some volunteers to share their list. Motivate them to value the qualities they possess and to ask God how to be incorporated into the different ministries of the church.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and markers or chalk.
- Instructions: Ask them to list examples of incompetent people in different positions or services. They can consider the places they frequent such as the workplace, study center, residence or public services.

Then, divide them into groups to discuss why these people do not do a good job in their responsibilities. Ask each group to prepare a list of possible causes for why they are incompetent. We all have capabilities but it depends on our willingness to do things well.

Connect

Navigate

A parable is one of the ways in which a truth can be communicated or simply expressed with an educational purpose. The parables help us understand in a simpler way and remember the lesson taught. Today, we will study a parable that is not well known and is found in Judges 9:7-21.

1. Who was Abimelech?

The passage refers to the time when Gideon (Jerobaal), the judge of Israel, had died (Judges 8:32-33). Judges 9:1-5 tells us that Abimelech was the son of Gideon who had many women and at least seventy children. Having many women was a symbol of wealth during that time. When Gideon died, the people of Israel left God again and prostituted themselves by following and worshiping other gods (Judges 8:33-35). Abimelech was the son of Gideon from a concubine or secondary wife (8:29-31; 9:18) who was from Shechem. Taking advantage of the moment, Abimelech, who was ambitious, self-sufficient and adventurous, went to Shechem, where his mother's brothers and all the family of the house of his mother's father were. There he appealed to this bond of such strong brotherhood and offered to be their king in exchange for their loyalty (Judges 9:1-3).

Ask your students: How would you rate Abimelech's attitude in Judges 9:4-6? Do you know some similar cases today? If so, which ones? Abimelech asked for 70 silver shekels to finance his macabre campaign. This money he received was from the temple of Baal-berit. It was customary for the cities of those times to collect gifts and money and keep them as public funds in the temples. In many cases, great wealth was accumulated. Judges 9:4 tells us that Abimelech hired men who were willing to do anything for a little money, "And they gave him seventy pieces of silver from the temple of Baal Berith, with which Abimelech hired some reckless adventurers to follow him." These evildoers helped him kill

69 of his step-brothers who lived in Ofra. The passage says that they were killed “on the same stone” (Judges 9:5). This suggests that they were executed and not killed in battle. Once the possible competition was eliminated, Abimelech was anointed as King. Only Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, was able to escape, which is how the parable of the trees originated.

2. Parable of the trees.

When Jotham learned what had happened, he went up Mount Gerizim and narrated a parable with a direct moral lesson. Jotham said that the trees wanted to choose a king (Judges 9:7-15).

He began the story with the olive tree (Judges 9:8-9). Olive oil was used to anoint kings, priests and prophets. It was also used for lighting purposes and in cooking. The olive tree’s excuse for not being king was that he could not give up his important work. They next chose the fig tree (Judges 9:10-11). It had a sweet fruit and was the most common tree at that time. He declined the offer because he could not leave his sweetness and good fruit to be king. Jotham continued the parable with the vine (Judges 9:12-13), who also declined the proposal. He preferred to give his grapes to be made into wine. The vine was a highly prized plant in Israel. As a last alternative they invited the bush (Judges 9:14-15). Ironically the bramble responded positively and told them to “stay under my shadow.” The bush is thorny, and it is very difficult to imagine a bush providing shade because it is not a tall tree. However, the bramble spoke to them with great authority and arrogance, threatening to burn the cedars of the Lebanon, (notable place for its valuable forests) if it was not chosen. The oil, the figs and the wine were agricultural products of great importance and very valuable, while the bramble was only used as firewood.

Finally Jotham made the application of his parable and questioned them if they had acted well in choosing their king. He asked them if that decision showed gratitude towards Gideon “who delivered them from the Midianites and even risked his life... because my father fought for you, and exposed his life to free you from the hand of Midian, and you have risen today against my father’s house, and you have killed his sons, seventy men on the same stone, and you have made Abimelech the son of his servant king over Shechem, because he is your brother” (Judges 9:17-18). If so, they would enjoy their king, but if the choice was wrong, fire would come from Abimelech against them and from them fire would go out to consume Abimelech (9:19-20). Once Jotham finished his speech, he escaped and fled, “And Jotham escaped and fled, and went to Beer because he feared his brother Abimelech” (9:21).

3. How do we apply this parable to our setting?

Today there are many young people with the ability, talent, intelligence, charisma and other virtues to serve in positions of responsibility. However, at times they do not accept those responsibilities so they end up in the hands of willing but incapable people who are not the right ones for the job. It is important to encourage young people to make the decision to accept the Lord’s call to serve Him.

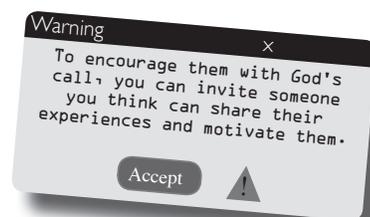
Today the same can happen in the church, town, city or even country if we do not act with the right intentions or motivations. The Lord wants young people to make a difference that moves and challenges others to change their principles. Paul told Timothy, a consecrated young man, not to despise his youth but to be an example to the believers in all his actions. “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12 NIV).

Being young is not an impediment to being an example to others and serving with excellence. Live according to God’s will and great things will be done in His name. It may be that at some time, accepting a challenge, a ministry, a mission or something that the pastor asks for, could eliminate the possibility of it falling into the hands of an “Abimelech”.

On one occasion, I read “God does not look for people trained to serve, God looks for servants willing to be trained.” It is normal to experience some fear when we accept a responsibility or to think that you are not old enough, or have experience. If the Lord calls, He will teach what is needed to serve Him. He knows his children perfectly and he wants to use them according to each one’s abilities.

On the other hand, if we have doubts about the ministry they have offered us, it is important to seek help and to train ourselves to give the best to the Lord.

Challenge: Say to your class: Check in your heart the call God has been making on your life lately and ask him sincerely to help you to do His will.



Who is Judge?

Lesson 17

José Samuel Mérida • Guatemala

Objective: That the students understand that only God is judge, and that every person is accountable to Him.

Memory Verse: *Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.* Psalm 96:13



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: One bucket with water and two sheets of aluminum foil.
- Instructions: With one sheet of foil make a ball and with the other a small boat. Ask the young people to judge what will happen when they put them in the water. When you put them in, you will see that one will float and the other will not, even if they are essentially two sheets

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: White sheets of paper, pens and blackboard.
- Instructions: Divide the class into groups of 3 to 4 people. If the group is small they can do it all together. Give them a few minutes to find examples of things or situations or words that at first sight look the same but are not, and then share them with the class. Finish by saying that we must be careful because sometimes things appear to be something they are not and can sometimes cause a lot of damage.

Connect

Navigate

When we are small, we are taught to wash our hands before eating and after going to the bathroom in order to wash off the germs. Although they are impossible to see with the naked eye, germs are on our hands and could make us sick. Even though our hands look clean, they are not always and must be washed with soap and water. In the same way, there are many things around us that can look the same but be totally different: A true ticket and a fake one, a bottle with water and one with poison, an honest person and a dishonest person, etc.

1. Wheat and tares

Wheat and tares are two plants that are very similar physically, with the great difference that one produces food and the other does not. They are so similar that farmers call the tares “fake wheat.” In ancient times, it was customary to plant weeds in an enemy’s field. This was done during the night to sabotage the harvest as an act of revenge. It was so common that Roman law considered this action a crime.

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus told the story of a field of wheat where, overnight, the workers detected the presence of weeds. The employer explained to the workers that the tares had been planted by an enemy during the night. The workers wanted to destroy it as soon as possible. They were surprised by the order of the boss to let the weeds grow in order to preserve the wheat, knowing that during the harvest, the tares would be the first to be cut and burned. Later in Matthew 13:37-43, Jesus explained the parable and revealed who the characters represented: The owner represented the Son of Man; the field, this world; the wheat represented the believers; the tares are those who serve as a stumbling block and do evil. They cannot be easily identified. The enemy is the devil.

Many times there are believers who adopt an attitude of rejection and condemnation against the person who does not proclaim or live openly according to the Word of God. We say that these people are not tolerant. When we speak of tolerance, we are not talking about accepting sin, but respecting the sinner (the person) as a human being created by God; confronting them with wisdom, love and the Word of God. Jesus hates sin but loves the sinner. In this parable, Jesus condemned the desire to “pluck up” (v. 29) or to remove those who served as stumbling blocks. Jesus stressed that the task of gathering those who served as stumbling blocks belonged to the angels sent from God (vv. 40-41).



2. God is the judge

Sometimes, believers fall into the trap of pointing out mistakes in other people's lives without any pastoral purpose or wisdom. The person is judged for not following the ways of the Lord and his punishment is desired. These attitudes are not useful for the Lord, because they distort the image of God's love for humanity. Only God fully knows the hearts of people, and only He can tell how sincere a person's love for Him is; no one else can. Jesus referred to this in Matthew 7:1 when he said, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." For example, when someone who was not known as a believer dies, many believers come to the conclusion that the person has been lost forever. But in reality, they do not know in depth the heart of the person, nor their last moments, nor what happened in the privacy of his or her heart. No one would have thought that the thief who died at the same time Jesus died would be saved at the last moment. It is not up to the people to judge, but to God. Sometimes believers become more sure of the other's demise than of their own salvation, and there is no wisdom in that. It is wiser to admit that only God can judge. James 4:12 says: "One alone is the giver of the law, who can save and lose; but who are you that you judge another?" God will judge everyone according to His knowledge.

3. Judging others

The Bible indicates that the responsibility of the believer is to encourage the neighbor who is not walking in the ways of the Lord or who deviated from Him. This can be done by encouraging him to face his situation or the sin that is leading him away from the Lord. The responsibility of the believer is first to pray for the neighbor and ask God for wisdom to approach the case. In any circumstance, the situation should be addressed in private, with love and humility. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." When detecting sin in the life of our neighbor, we must not forget that we were also forgiven and that there are no big sins nor small sins. Sin is sin.

Our task is not to judge and condemn, it is not to pull up the weeds, but to present the biblical message of God's love and grace that leads to repentance. On the other hand, we must differentiate the judging of the defense of the faith and naming sin for what it is, which is necessary. There is testimony in the Scriptures (the prophets, Isaiah 29:13, Jesus himself referring to the Pharisees, Matthew 15:7.22:18.23:12; Paul referring to some cases, Romans 16:17-18) and in the history of the church (Luther against the Papacy, John Wesley against the Anglican church, etc.).

4. A mandate to love

Our responsibility as believers is to bear witness to the love of God for every person. Every attitude and word should show love to people and bring them closer to God. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." (Ephesians 4:29). Regardless of the mistakes that other people have made or are committing, our Christian testimony must remain valid. We serve a God who restored us, continues to restore us, and calls us to bear witness to that restoration. God did not call us to judge. He alone is judge. When we take His place, we lose the opportunity to serve effectively. "The Lord is great in mercy and slow to anger" (Psalm 145:7-9). As his disciples, we must be wise in how we treat people who share other beliefs or lifestyles. The call to be light must be fulfilled. Remember the challenge in Hebrews 10:24, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds," and let's practice it. We should not accept our neighbor's sin, but reflect wisdom and God's love when we confront them with love and the Word. Let us ask the Lord for wisdom so that our actions and words lead us to be the wheat and not become the tares. May our attitude always attract people to Him and not cause pain or sadness.

Review/Apply: You can use these questions while you are developing the lesson or at the end of it.

1. What does it mean to judge? (Determining if an action deserves reward or punishment.)
2. Is someone with a tattoo or a vice a bad person? Why or why not? (Not necessarily.)
3. Can a criminal have eternal life? (Not as long as he remains in that condition. If he repents and recognizes Jesus as his Savior he can be saved.)
4. Who has eternal life? (All who repent of sin and recognize Jesus as Savior has eternal life.)
5. Who is the one who knows the heart? (Only God.)
6. How should we treat those who have a faith different from ours? (How we want to be treated.)
7. How should we treat someone who turned away from the Lord? (With love and wisdom, always seeking the Lord.)
8. How should we present the gospel to people? (With our testimony, actions and attitudes)

Challenge: Say to your class: Reflect on the attitudes you have had in your life regarding the behavior of others. They can be people of your same age or older than you, maybe someone with authority over you, such as a parent, teacher, leader, etc. This week, determine to memorize and repeat the verse in Galatians 6:1 and ask God for help in refocusing your thoughts.



What are you doing with what you have?

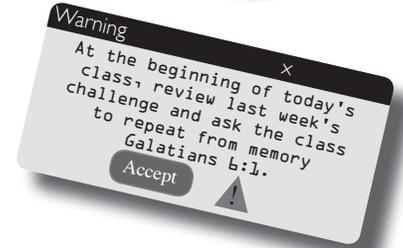
Lesson

Joel Castro • Spain

18

Objective: That each student knows his/her talents and gifts and puts them at the Lord's service.

Memory Verse: *Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. 1 Peter 4:1*



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: A ball.
- Instructions: Ask them to sit in a circle and throw the ball to each other screaming land, air and water. For example, a player throws the ball and says "land." The player receiving the ball must say the name of an animal that lives on land (example: lion). He must say the name of the animal before the person who threw the ball finishes counting to ten. Whoever does not respond in time leaves the circle. At the end, explain that everything God has created was done with a special purpose. God gave his children talents and abilities to collaborate in his salvific work.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: One sheet and one pen for each student.
- Instructions: Give a blank sheet of paper to each of your students and ask them to write the answer to the following question: If you received a lot of money (mention a large amount of money in the currency of your country) what would you do with that money, or what would you buy, or how would you invest it?

After about 5 minutes, check their answers and analyze how they would spend or invest it. It is important to see the student's ability to make good investments or on the other hand analyze unnecessary expenses.

Connect

Navigate

The parables are stories that Jesus used to help us understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. God knows that the human mind is finite. In order to help us understand spiritual things, he used earthly examples to extract a spiritual teaching. Matthew 24:3 says that Jesus was on the Mount of Olives and from that place he taught what is found in Matthew 24 and 25. This was two days before Jesus was arrested and later crucified (Matthew 26:2). Jesus also told the parable of the talents. He began by saying that a man went away, referring to himself, because soon he would be sacrificed and then raised to heaven from the Mount of Olives, from where he was teaching this parable.

1. The order

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a man who before his journey called his servants and entrusted them with his possessions (Matthew 25:14-30).

He gave the first five talents, the second two talents and the third, one talent. "... to each according to his ability; and then he went away "(Matthew 25:15). A talent was a monetary measure that amounted to six thousand drachmas, a drachma in turn was equal to a denarius and a denarius was equivalent to the salary of a day's work. (To have an estimated number in your national currency multiply 17 by the value of the base salary in your country.) Talents monetarily indicated a lot of money, but spiritually they referred to the spiritual wealth God has entrusted. Note that the talents that the Lord gave to the servants were according to their abilities. God distributed gifts, talents, abilities and special abilities to glorify his name and to edify the body of Christ. In each particular case he gave according to each one's capacity.

We all have a very special potential that we must use for the glory of God; we just have to discover it to put it at God's service. In the following list we see some people to whom God gave gifts, talents and aptitudes

that were useful in their service to God:

- a. Genesis 41. Joseph had the capacity to administer and was the governor of a great nation.
- b. Joshua 1. Joshua had the ability to lead, and he led the people of Israel to the promised land.
- c. Judges 4. Deborah was a leader who did not get discouraged and trusted in the One who promised her victory.
- d. 1 Samuel 16:1-13. David was a musician, pastor, warrior, psalmist or poet, conqueror and king.
- e. In the New Testament, we find John, Timothy, Titus, Stephen, the apostle Paul's co-workers such as Epaphras, Epaphroditus, and Philemon. All of them fulfilled their calling until death.

Just as these people put their talents to God's service and multiplied them, the Lord also wants to see many young people serve according to the special abilities He has given them.

2. Giving account

This is the most joyful or sad part of the parable. What did the master say to his servants when he returned from his trip? First came the one who had received 5 talents with a gain of 5 more talents. This doubled the capital given to him by his master (Matthew 25:21,23). This made the master happy and he shared in the joy of his lord. The one who had received 2 talents brought another 2 talents, doubling the capital that his master left him. His lord also let him share in his joy. But when the last of the servants arrived, the one who had received only one talent, sadness and rejection filled the place where the servant and the master were (Matthew 25:30). This last servant tried to justify himself, but it was not worth anything because his master had left him a task and he did not comply. Therefore he threw him into the darkness, where he would cry forever.

3. The parable for us today

The first two servants represent those people who work hard to make the best of their abilities serving God in a compassionate and sincere way. The way they doubled their talents teaches us to do the same, to serve the Lord, work and give your best effort. The joy of the master was not so much for what they produced but for the effort in doubling what they had been given.

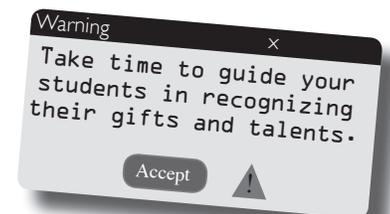
Ask: What do you know how to do? Ask them to write down everything they know how to do (bake, weave, paint, draw, clean, play an instrument, choreograph, direct people, direct programs, teach, preach, manage computers, etc.). All we know how to do must be done from the heart and with excellence so we will gladden God's heart. It is not only doing what we know, but doing it well.

It is also our responsibility to teach it to others. The last servant represents a lazy, selfish and negligent person (Matthew 25:24-27). His fear of not being successful kept him from working. He wanted to impress his master, hiding the reality of his bad investment (Matthew 25:25). The fear expressed by the servant was to gain pity from his master; however this expression was no more than an excuse.

Fear makes useless, fear of God makes us useful. Fear is part of the excuse. Fear of God prompts us to comply; fear is carnal, fear of God is spiritual; fear impoverishes, fear of God enriches; fear makes one look down, fear of God makes one look up; fear makes one cower; fear of God strengthens; fear becomes pessimistic, fear of God makes one optimistic; fear makes us see how little we are worth, fear of God makes us see how much we are worth; fear makes us see that we have little or no talent, the fear of God makes us see that with little we can do much; and finally, fear makes us hide our talent, but the fear of God makes us double it like the previous servants.

The following teachings are obtained from the master's response: God knows each one's potential, no matter what gifts or talents we have. Even if with only one talent, He wants us to be wise in using it. The least we can do with our skills is to use them and teach others to use theirs. This is what the master meant in verse 27. There is a piece of advice that says: It is good to fish with someone, but it is much better to teach them how to fish. Let's use the talents and gifts that we possess because Jesus Christ will come back and ask for accounts.

Challenge: Say to your class: Do you want to know what your gifts and talents are? Talk with me or another youth leader or our pastor and about your desire to work in God's work. Ask him/her what you need to do to discover your true service to God, and you will not go through the bad experience of the last servant of this parable. Do not leave this for later, start this week.



The Kingdom on Earth

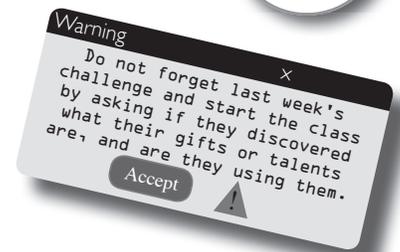
Lesson

19

Eudo Prado • Venezuela

Objective: That the students understand how God's kingdom manifests itself in the world.

Memory Verse: ...because the Kingdom of God is within you. Luke 17:21b



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Divide the class into groups of 3 to 4 people unless the class is too small. Give a few minutes to find examples of small things that can do great things (phone chip allows us to communicate with the world, termites can destroy a wooden house, ants can carry things up to three times their weight, etc). Give a few minutes for them to find examples and then share them. It is possible that no one can explain exactly how these things happen, but it is extraordinary that something so small can perform such complex functions.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Two cups of flour, two containers, two glasses of water, salt, two packets of yeast (10 grams), two cloths.
- Instructions: Form two groups. Give the ingredients to each group and ask them to prepare a dough in the following way: Dissolve the yeast in water, add the flour little by little, add a little salt and knead. Cover the dough with the cloth for 15 to 20 minutes. You can begin to give the lesson. When talking about yeast, ask them to check the dough to see if it has risen. Give some time to comment.

Connect

Navigate

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a small seed that develops into a big tree, and with the yeast that ferments and makes dough rise. The parables of the mustard seed and yeast are two of the seven parables on the Kingdom of God that appear in Matthew 13. Both refer to the growth of God's kingdom until its full expansion (Matthew 13:31-33). They show how God carries forward His purpose of salvation, and also that He wants to use us in that purpose. Some of the wonderful things God does cannot be seen directly but the Bible says that the invisible things of God have always been clearly visible through His creation (Romans 1:20).

Our own lives are reflections of the unlimited power of God. For example, we can think of genes (a gene is the unit of heredity that is transferred from a parent to an offspring). Genes are microscopic but they determine characteristics such as the color and shape of eyes, hair, etc. This is the genetic inheritance that is transmitted from parents to children. It can be said that the gene is like the small seed of our life that will determine many of our characteristics.

So also is the Kingdom of God. It is a Kingdom that by its nature is heavenly and eternal. That is why Jesus said that his Kingdom is not of this world, but it is also present and working and seen in our midst. This is when the will of God is fulfilled. The greatest thing of all is that all of God's children are an active part of this wonderful Kingdom.

1. Sowing the seed of the Kingdom

In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus compared his Kingdom with a small mustard seed that a man sowed in his field. With the passage of time, this seed sprouted and developed like a large tree (the mustard seed was very common in Palestine and developed into a large bush). The Kingdom of God cannot be seen with the naked eye but it is present and developing in the world. It is interesting that the seed of the Kingdom can represent the children of God in the world (as in the parable of the tares and the wheat). This means that God has placed us to exert a positive influence among the people around us. It can be family, classmates, people in our community, our brothers and sisters in the church, etc. It can be literally said that "God has sown our life



in the world,” and he has done it to use us to do great things! Many people can know God and fulfill the purpose He has for their lives by witnessing our testimony of Christian behavior. Ask: Can you imagine how God can use your life as as the little seed to build the lives of many?

The seed of the Kingdom can also be seen as the Word of God that is sown in hearts, that is, the Gospel of the Kingdom (as in the parable of the sower). We can say that when the Word of God is sown in one heart and it produces fruit for God, his Kingdom manifests itself in that life (Matthew 13:23). The Word of God transforms people from the inside out. This is how the Kingdom of God manifests itself in our character as a new model of life centered on Christ. In other words, the Kingdom of God manifests itself when one obeys the will of God (Matthew 6:10). Discuss the following questions with your students: How important is it for you to share the gospel with others? Do you allow the Kingdom of God to manifest itself in your life? Are you aware that you are a representative of the Kingdom of God? How are you representing the Kingdom of God among the people around you?

2. Showing the fruits of the Kingdom

Ask: Can you imagine what the world would be like if everyone obeyed the Word of God? Thefts, murders and all kinds of injustice would end. It would be something wonderful! In the passage we are studying, in verse 32, it says that the mustard seed developed into a tree where birds made their nests. In other passages of the Bible, birds represent the nations (Ezekiel 17:23-24, Daniel 4:11-12). In this way, perhaps, Jesus was indicating the progressive extension of his Kingdom to the whole world. The world is changing as people come to know God. When we know God, we produce the fruit of his Kingdom. We are not Christians just because we call ourselves Christians, fulfill religious duties or attend a church, but because we live a life in the likeness of Christ (John 8:31, 13:35, 15:8). A life of purity and the miraculous manifestation of God through his children are a tangible demonstration of the presence of the Kingdom of God (Romans 14:17). The Jews of Jesus’ time thought that by the mere fact of belonging to the people of God, they had already secured salvation and blessings. Jesus warned them that because of their disobedience, God would take His Kingdom out of their midst and give it to people who were willing to produce fruit (Matthew 21:43). Is it not true that sometimes we think in the same way as those Jews? We are in the church but we do not manifest the fruit of the Kingdom of God.

3. Seeking the fullness of the Kingdom

God has prepared great things for his children ... things that we cannot even imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9). God’s will is to bless His children fully. God is seeking to perfect every aspect of your life. The Bible says that God will fulfill His purpose (Philippians 1:6). In the parable of the yeast in Matthew 13:33, a woman hid or mixed the yeast in the flour. The result of this was that the dough was completely fermented. This speaks to us of the mysterious realization of God’s purpose. Did you know that nothing can oppose God’s sovereign purpose? Although today the presence of God has been reduced simply to the spectacular, the Bible teaches that many times the work of God in our lives is almost imperceptible. Maybe we do not feel it, but God is always present, working for our good. The power of God works mysteriously and quietly, like yeast in the dough, until it affects everything. This happens both in our life and in the rest of the world. God is fulfilling his purpose. The Bible commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This means being filled with the fullness of God. When God’s children are filled with His presence, the fullness of God’s kingdom among us will be increasingly seen.

Review/Apply: Have your students answer the following:

1. What is a possible meaning of God’s Kingdom in the parable of the mustard seed? *God’s children in the world or God’s Word in the world.*
2. How is God’s Kingdom manifested through our character? *As an example of a Christ-centered life.*
3. Give an example of the manifestation of the presence of God’s Kingdom? *A life of purity and God’s miracles in the lives of His children.*
4. What is the parable of the yeast about? *God’s mysterious purposes*

Challenge: Say to your class: This week, give evangelistic leaflets or invitations from the church to three people you know (relatives, neighbors, classmates, etc.) that you know do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Do this as part of your practical purpose of participating in the extension of the Kingdom of God.



True or False?

Lesson 20

Yeri Nieto • Mexico

Objective: That students will learn to not be guided by appearances and to strive to seek to live a transparent life before the Lord.

Memory Verse: *For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.* Luke 18:14b



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Ask the students to answer the following question: Which of my actions show that I am a Christian? How/Why?
Finish by stating that actions can and should show that a person is a Christian, but these can be dangerous if we use them only and exclusively to “prove” to people that we are followers of Christ, and are not born of a sincere heart.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Pencils and paper
- Instructions: Ask them to answer the following question: What external actions of another person helps me to identify if he/she is a Christian? Why?
Guide the conversation about how dangerous it is to make judgments about other people.

Connect

Navigate

1. The context of the parable.

The context of the parable of Luke 18:9-14 is striking since it is found between “The Parable of the Judge and the Widow” (Luke 18:1-8) and “The Blessing of Jesus to Children” (Luke 18:15-17). The first story talks about the effectiveness of persistent prayer, while the story of the children serves as the perfect ending for the parable we are studying. The parable narrated by Jesus says that two men went up to the temple to pray. The temple of Jerusalem, at that time, was the center of worship of God for the Jewish people. It was normal to go up to pray at the temple, as it is currently normal to go to a church to maintain fellowship with God. The temple was the place built for fellowship and worship of God. One of those two men was a Pharisee. The word “Pharisee” did not have a derogatory meaning at that historical moment; on the contrary, the Pharisees constituted a religious group that most Jewish people admired and followed as their spiritual leaders. They studied the Law meticulously and wished to obey it completely, so much so that sometimes they exaggerated the way in which they applied it. Unfortunately, many of them relied on their own works rather than the mercy of God.

The other man was a Publican. The Publicans were tax collectors; they offered themselves as bureaucrats to the Roman system to collect taxes. Many Publicans became rich by charging more taxes than they were supposed to. This caused the Jewish people in general to hate them and consider them traitors.

This is a parable where Jesus mentions two people face to face to highlight their attitudes. On the one hand there was a Pharisee, the highly admired spiritual leader in the town, and on the other, there was the one who was disowned, treated as a sinner so much so that they were not considered part of God’s people. Today there are people in congregations who are recognized for their faith, and people of very doubtful spiritual quality. Perhaps within your group of young people there are people who are admired, but there are also other people who are considered to be far from having fellowship with God. Jesus wants us to notice that reality around us.

2. The outcome of the parable

The confrontation of both characters (Pharisee and publican) is superlative: The Pharisee did not go to pray to the temple, but to speak out loud so that others could hear him. He was standing and his words were centered on himself (in Greek, the pronoun “I” appears four times). It was evident that he did not need

God, but trusted in his own justice and he believed himself to be self-sufficient (there were no requests to God), and able to meet all the requirements to be a good religious man. He boasted that he fasted twice a week and he tithed everything he earned. Those actions made him feel superior to other people, such as thieves, adulterers and even the Publican who was in the same temple as him.

The publican, however, no matter how sinful he was, took on a different stance. He presented himself as a debtor, a man filled with great sadness for his sin. He did not dare approach the altar, he stayed at a distance and he did not raise his eyes to heaven. He beat his chest and only managed to say, "God, be merciful to me, I am a sinner". He did not mention what he had done. Maybe he had stolen something and realized that the Law required him to return what he had stolen. According to Leviticus 6:2-5, this man had to give back everything he had taken from the people, plus an additional fifth. Surely he could not do it, and that's why he threw himself to God's mercy.

In today's church, there are also people who do not pray to God, but only raise their voices to be noticed. These people do not dare humble themselves, but want to presume that they have a relationship with God. There are also people who want God's forgiveness regardless of the great amount or size of their sin. There are people who do not know how to pray, but who long for a merciful response from God.

3. Unexpected end of the parable

"I tell you that the Publican went home justified before God" Luke 18:14a. But we could ask: Did the sinner receive forgiveness? And what about what he stole? And the fulfillment of the Law? And his responsibilities? And the commands of the Lord for his life? Was he forgiven just like that? The answer is yes! Jesus Christ said that this publican was forgiven. He was forgiven because he humbled himself before God. It's strange, right? We are used to having to have consequences of our actions and paying for what we did wrong. In fact, when we forgive someone, we are always reminding them (with words or small gestures) that we forgive them. Jesus Christ taught that His forgiveness has nothing to do with the values of society. His way of measuring is not like ours. He says: "When sin abounds, grace abounds" (Romans 5:20). Psalm 51:17 says: "... You will not despise a contrite and humbled heart, O God." God is pleased when the person recognizes his fault in situations and seeks forgiveness and divine restoration.

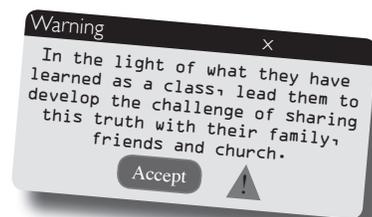
We need to be careful with our actions. Ask: Do we do things truly for God, or only for others to observe us? Are our prayers humbling ourselves before Him, or do they seek another purpose? Do we tell God that we need His presence and His blessings, or do we think we are self-sufficient? We need to take care of what we do, both inside and outside the church. Ask: Do you think you have spiritual superiority? Or do you feel superior in some other aspect? (Although no one will answer these questions, they will think). Let's get rid of prejudices: Even if we come punctually to church, sing well, know many hymns, read the Bible during the week, weep at the altar, share about Christ with others, God will not attend to our prayers unless they are born of a humble heart (Psalm 138:6). You do not have to judge people by appearances! The mercy of God is very great. The central phrase of this passage: "Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (18:14b), is confirmed by the blessing that Jesus gave to the children in Luke 18:15-17. You must live the Christian life by being humble and resting in God's mercy. How? Like the children who are heirs of the Kingdom of God. Let each sentence be elaborated with simple words, like a child's. God will surely hear!

Review/Apply: Read the following phrase to your class and give them time to answer the following questions. Ask them to come up with a personal phrase to encourage humility.

"All people are better than me in some aspect... I can learn from them in that aspect".

1. How can this phrase be a useful tool in learning to live a life of humility.
2. What commitment to God can we make today that not only shows we are Christians but that we are true followers of Christ?
3. If a child lived this phrase, what could we learn from him?
4. How should we treat others who seem "less spiritual" than us?

Challenge: Say to your class: This week, avoid judging people by their appearances and strive to share the mercy that God has shown you. A simple way to start is to pray with sincerity.



God's Disappointment

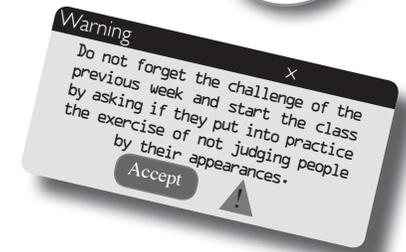
Lesson

21

Loysbel Pérez • Cuba

Objective: That the students understand that God is love, but He is also just and punishes His people when they stray from His commandments.

Memory Verse: ... *Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.* Isaiah 5:2c



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil.
- Instructions: Divide the class into two or three groups and ask them to write a situation in which someone invests all his energy into something and it does not work for them. At the end, ask them to write down what feelings that situation generates. Give some time for them to share what they discussed in the groups.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk or markers.
- Instructions: Write the question on the board: What would you do if the person you always confided in disappointed you? Write the answers on the board (you can give an idea of a situation that best illustrates the question). After all the comments have been voiced, have the students reflect on how God would feel if we disappointed Him.

Connect

Navigate

Using a parable, Isaiah (5:1-7) expounded in a beautiful song the immense disappointment that God suffered due to the behavior of Israel. As in every parable, every word does not transmit a message to us but the words come together in a well structured message that allows the author to teach spiritual truths to his readers.

1. The sin of the nation of Israel

This parable is within a prophetic book which makes it even more interesting. Isaiah used this literary genre to predict what would happen in the near future with the nation of Israel. An important part of the biblical Israelite prophecies of this great period was that they revealed the present, warning the people, kings and priests about the spiritual and social condition in which they found themselves, and what God would do if their sin did not cease (vv. 5-7). In all of Israel's history, their sin and their lack of faithfulness to God was consistently evident. The context in which Isaiah wrote was unfavorable in every way. Politically, the rebels were corrupt and loving themselves, making plans without consulting the Lord (Isaiah 1:2). Spiritually, the priests did not do their duty, religion was based on sacrifices, but their lives were far from God (Isaiah 1:10-17). There was rebellion against God and idolatry was common. Socially, the inequality between classes was terrible (Isaiah 1:21-23).

The nation of Israel was represented in the parable of Isaiah 5:1-7 as a vineyard. The New International Version uses the term of wild grapes, substituting it for sour grapes. The grapevine required very intense care, which represented the care that God showed for His people. The term "sour grapes" is used to designate sin as the fruit in the life of these people. God expected Israel to react positively to His love, but despite all the care He showed His people (since their rescue from the bondage of Egypt), they persisted in disobeying God and continuing to sin.

Today sin continues to be a deadly poison, destroying the relationship with God, life, family and affecting the testimony of the church. When we think for a moment of the goodness of God in our lives and in everything He has done for us and in His continuous care, we should only be motivated to live for Him and to please Him every moment. But it is sad when a person's life is a reflection of this parable, when after having experienced the goodness of God, still allows sin to occupy a place in their daily journey. This parable motivates us not to yield to temptation, but to live a life of obedience, not yielding to peer pressure



at school, work, family or friends (James 4:7).

2. The judgment of God because of sin.

Judgment is described with words related to the cultivation process of the vineyard (vv. 5-6). This picturesque language illustrated how God would remove all the conditions that made cultivation achieve its maximum splendor and performance. This undoubtedly denoted judgment. Isaiah was prophesying the consequences of Israel's sinful life. God was saying, enough! He did everything for His people, expecting righteousness and justice from them, but the result was the opposite. This prophet's words pronounced the judgment that would take place over the nation. These words were fulfilled when God chose a nation as powerful as Assyria to be an instrument of punishment to His chosen people. The judgment of God was terrible; there was destruction on all sides, the people were taken captive to a foreign nation, and for long years they suffered exile.

Guide your students to reflect on the consequences of sin on a social and spiritual level. When analyzing the whole biblical history, it is observed that sin always brought dire consequences. God's judgment is not limited to the end of time, much of the sin that is practiced today has consequences now AND in eternity. Although the church enjoys the dispensation of grace, where Jesus is the intercessor before God and the Holy Spirit is our daily guide, the people are responsible for the consequences due to actions that displease the Lord. God is not constantly observing like a police officer to enact judgment at the time His law is violated. The character and work of God with the church is very far from that. His love goes much further, but His judgment should be understood as a warning attitude, and we should seek repentance and greater intimacy with Him.

3. God's redeeming love

Allow time for students to comment on some of their personal experiences where they directly observed the love of God. God's love has no limits, it forms part of His essential being and continues to be manifested to mankind at all times. All His character is shaped by this love. God was always aware of the problems His people faced, and loved them in spite of all the infidelities committed. But in this passage, we see that God no longer tolerated the sins, and issued a judgment against Israel. Isaiah prophesied an exile. There is a question that is key in this biblical text, "What else can I do to my vineyard that I have not already done with it?" This question reveals the immense love and care of God towards His people. He exhausted all resources to make His people repent. He chose to not do anything for Israel anymore (Isaiah 5:4). It was a crucial moment in God's relationship with His beloved people. God did not put an end to His love, but the judgment that would come would be as part of His constant love. Let's not forget that God is love, but also is just (Hebrews 12:6).

There is an interesting correlation of God's love and justice. Love does not exempt judgment. The parable does not express the end of God's love for Israel, but a new condition in that relationship. His love continued to be with them in exile. He never departed from them, and subsequently allowed them to return to their land. The ultimate expression of His love in our time was the sacrificial death of Jesus, His blood cleansing sin from everyone who repents and lives according to His commandments (1 John 1:7). His love manifests itself in every second that passes in the lives of His children. It is necessary to be sensitive to Him to see what He is doing in and through His children.

Review/Apply: Ask your class to answer the following questions and fill in the missing words in the following sentences:

1. Why was God disappointed in Israel? *God's disappointment was due to what Israel did, and didn't do, in response to God's constant concern and love.*
2. The term **sour grapes** is used to describe the sin in the lives of these people.
3. Do not give in to the pressure of your peers that aren't believers, rather **be an example** to them by rejecting sin and **God will not be disappointed with you.**
4. God's judgment is not limited to the end times. **The sin** we practice **today** has consequences **now** and if we do not repent, it will have consequences in the future also.
5. According to Isaiah 5:4a, what is the key question in this biblical text? *What else can I do with my vineyard that I have not already done?*

Challenge: Tell your class: Reflect if there are aspects of your life that disappoint God. If so, make a commitment this week to seek help from God to overcome them and gain victory.



Once Upon a Time

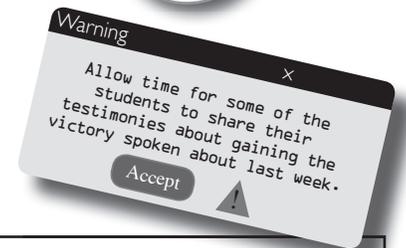
Lesson

22

Juan Carlos Fernández • Cuba

Objective: The students should understand that according to the Bible, abusing the poor or remaining indifferent towards poverty are sins comparable to adultery and homicide.

Memory Verse: *Whoever mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker. Prov. 17:5a*



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Five students and one package of candy
- Instructions: Choose five students and explain the drama beforehand. Once in class, give three candies to 4 of the students and only one to the fifth. Then one of the four will go to the one who has one, will take his candy and will not give it back, but will eat it. The others will begin to eat their candies, while the one left with nothing will look disconsolate, doing nothing. Then ask the rest of the class their opinion about the situation. At the end of the class, you can distribute sweets to everyone.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Some candy.
- Instructions: As the students enter the class, hand out a candy to each one. At the end, stay with the bag with several candies and keep them and go and remove the candy from someone in the class and eat it. Then ask the class what you think of that attitude. Write down the answers on the board and ask them to summarize what was said in one sentence. At the end of the students' contributions, give a piece of candy to the person you took it from before beginning the lesson.

Connect

Navigate

Read the background of the story in 2 Samuel 11:1-27.

1. Once there was a bored king

The afternoon was ending. King David had just gotten up from his bed and was looking for something to entertain himself. While he was walking on the roof of the royal house, looking around, he saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. It is very likely that this woman was naked. David observed her beauty, and immediately found out who she was. Even knowing that she was a married woman, he sent for her to sleep with her.

Up to here, everything was kept secret, but soon the consequences caught up with the king. Bathsheba, the woman, became pregnant (2 Samuel 11:2-5).

It is evident that Bathsheba had been discreet. Otherwise, it would have endangered her life as well as her husband's. However, now there no way of hiding the matter, so she decided to tell the future dad. David tried to resolve the matter deceitfully (2 Samuel 11:6-8). The king planned to send Bathsheba's husband (who was in the war, v. 6) to his house. If the husband arrived tired, coming from the battlefield, he would bathe, eat, drink, replenish his strength and be sure to have sexual relations with his wife. Certainly no one would dare deny that God had awarded the warrior and his wife with a pregnancy, in the midst of the ups and downs of war.

2. An unexpected result

The soldier's fidelity surprisingly put the king in check (2 Samuel 11:6-13). So the king decided to draw up a plan to do away with someone who had never been his rival or his enemy, but rather the opposite, the greatest of his men (vv. 14-17). The king's lust and adultery caused a problem that neither deception nor hypocrisy were sufficient to solve. It was necessary to sacrifice a victim to obtain silence, so that all things would return to normal, at least in appearance. The rich man had not only taken for himself the only treasure of the poor man, but he would also take his life. Uriah was sent (by order of the king) to the most difficult place in the battle and as expected, was killed in combat. The noble king took the widow as his wife. This appeared to be a "solemn gesture of self-denial and altruism." With this action, the sweet singer of Israel believed he had put a seal on the secret of their evil, and gave a happy end to the macabre episode.

3. A prophet sent from God

It is difficult to determine exactly how much time that elapsed between this episode and the visit of the prophet Nathan. However, everything seems to indicate that it was not much. Nathan thought it necessary to create a mirror where David could take a look at himself, without realizing that he was actually looking at his own life. Only then would the mission succeed. King David was sitting on his throne, listening attentively to the story that the prophet Nathan told him (1 Samuel 12:1).

While he was listening to Nathan's story, (2 Samuel 12:1-4), feelings of justice awakened in the king. The end turned out to be so ruthless and cruel that the monarch was furious and without hesitation, pronounced a death sentence against the culprit (2 Samuel 12:5). Without knowing, King David had condemned himself. The prophet immediately took the opportunity to tell him that he was this man (2 Samuel 12:7). At that moment, David repented, but he was still disciplined by the justice of God. The consequences would come upon him in three ways: the sword would never leave his house, his women would lie with other men, (not secretly, as he had done, but in his full knowledge), and finally the son who was conceived with Bathsheba would die (2 Samuel 12:10-14). We cannot forget, David acknowledged his sin, he repented and in the midst of his times alone with God he even wrote psalms as precious as 32, 51 and 103, showing the repentance and humility of his heart. His repentance was always superior to his wickedness, which led him to the path of restoration (2 Samuel 12:13).

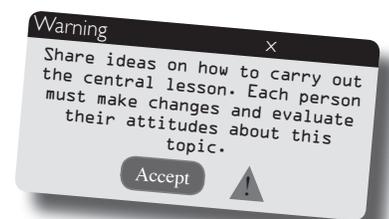
4. Once there was a poor abused ...

In the parables, the image of the poor man is used again and again, trying to convey different messages. It is obvious that there are different types of poverty, as well as different factors that cause it, such as unjust regimes, unequal distribution of wealth, geographical fatalities and many others. The passage studied (2 Samuel 12:1-14) refers to David's sins, his repentance, punishment and restoration. However, you can appreciate something more. Nathan, trying to get David to reflect on his acts (adultery, lying and murder) used the perspective of Uriah and abuse perpetrated on a poor man, by another who enjoyed great material wealth. David understood the great evil involved in the abuse towards those who have less, and without even realizing it was referring to him, the king judged and condemned himself. The poor man in the story of the prophet Nathan represents those who have lost hope. It represents the voice of moan and lament. The sin of the rich man was not his wealth, it was the abuse of power towards a poor man. Some negative attitudes can be highlighted in the rich man. First, selfishness in not sharing his own with his guest, "did not want to take from his sheep and herd to cook for the wayfarer who had come to him" (2 Samuel 12:4). Although he had enough to be able to share, he was not willing to do so. Second, the abuse of power towards a defenseless person. Possibly the rich man did not go in person to take the poor man's sheep, but he sent his employees to threaten and achieve the goal in any way. The law given by God through Moses required the care of the poor (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 19:10,15).

Review/Apply: Ask your students to write the answers to the questions from 1 Samuel 11 and 12 (this can be completed during the lesson).

1. What work was David doing when he saw Bathsheba, and devised his plan to possess her? *David was not doing anything and he was bored. He was idle (2 Samuel 11:2).*
2. What strategy did the king use when he learned that the warrior's wife was pregnant by him? *David had Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, brought back from the war with the intention of him sleeping with her to justify her pregnancy (2 Samuel 11:6).*
3. What was the attitude of the soldier? *He refused to go to his home because he did not consider himself worthy of such a privilege while his companions were at war (2 Samuel 11:9).*
4. With what did Nathan the prophet compare the acts of David? *He compared it to a poor man who was abused by a rich man (2 Samuel 12:4).*
5. How are the stories of the rich abuser and that of the adulterous and murderous king similar? *Because both are an abomination to the Lord.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Examine your daily actions in relation to poor people, and poverty itself. If it is necessary to make some adjustments in what you do, ask the Lord to guide and strengthen you. Record your reactions whenever you have the possibility to help others so you can observe your progress. Make sure you are thriving in this area. Do not be content only to express your sympathy, rather try to turn your words into works of help and compassion.



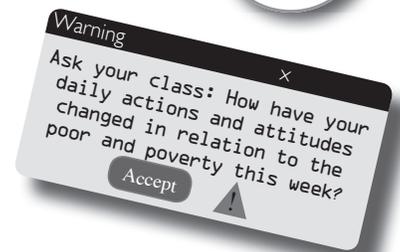
Obedience and Submission

Lesson 23

Flavia de Ventura • Argentina

Objective: That the students will see the fruit of Ruth's obedience and submission.

Memory Verse: ... *Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.* Ruth 1:16



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- **Materials:** Sheets of paper, wax crayons, wooden skewers or toothpicks
- **Instructions:** Ask students to color the sheet completely using bright colors and without leaving blank spaces. Then ask them to color over it all with a black crayon and set it aside during the lesson. At the conclusion of the lesson, each student will scrape a design on the sheet using the toothpick or skewer. This will illustrate what happens many times in our lives, we strive to achieve good results in our projects, but without thinking, situations appear that seem to spoil everything (black crayon covering). The important thing in understanding that God can bring out the best (bright colors underneath) and use the difficulties to reveal something beautiful in our lives.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- **Materials:** Sheet or magazine cutouts with a nice landscaping or scenery.
- **Instructions:** Present the chosen image and give time for the group to describe it and mention everything it inspires. Once they have finished, take the sheet and tear it into small pieces (not tiny, trying that in each cut piece you can distinguish that part of the total picture is displayed) After this, invite the group to re-create the first image. This happens many times in our lives, we are satisfied by the good we have achieved, perhaps as with this initial image, but something happens and everything breaks into pieces. However when we see the reconstructed image we can find more value. So God does with us, even if things happen that want to destroy us, we know that God is always restoring our lives.

Connect

Navigate

1. Ruth, a determined woman

There are many lessons that can be learned from Ruth's life. One of these is her remarkably firm spirit in the midst of difficult decisions. In this first chapter, Ruth was confronted with making hard decisions.

a. A place in the world.

Naomi was widowed and had lost her two sons. Faced with this situation, she decided to return to Bethlehem, her hometown. Naomi knew that her daughters-in-law were from Moab, so she proposed that they stay in their land, where it would be easier for them to rebuild their lives. Ruth found herself facing an important decision. If she decided to go with her mother-in-law, her life would change drastically. Changing land and family symbolized changing customs, and even faith. However, Ruth decided to stay with what she knew up close, the faith of Naomi's family. Naomi's family was of the people of Israel, and they lived a life pleasing to God. Ruth saw the fruits of that faith; she was a witness of how God always sustained her mother-in-law. When Naomi insisted that her daughters-in-law stay in Moab, Orpha sadly said goodbye but Ruth decided to accompany her (Ruth 1:16-17).

b. A true God

In Ruth 1:16-17, we can see the various ways Ruth decided to follow her mother-in-law. One of them was in her relationship with God. Ruth not only wanted to "share" Naomi's God, but she wanted to have a relationship with God. Wonderfully, God has a redemptive plan mankind, not only for a few, but for all who believe in Him (John 3:16, Ephesians 3:4-6). God used Ruth to be the ancestor of King David, and she appears in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

2. Ruth, a submissive and obedient woman

Ruth and Naomi started back to Bethlehem and arrived there with no material possessions, without work, without a house, and without family, but with the conviction of having done the right thing. Ruth never left her role as “daughter”. The love for her mother-in-law was real, she submitted herself to Naomi’s authority. Naomi’s testimony as a daughter of God impacted Ruth.

The word “submission” is not normally used as a positive trait; it is believed that it is contradictory to the word “independent” and that it leads the person to lose his or her individuality and ability to make his/her own decisions. However, the Bible commands us to be submissive to God as Sovereign, Creator and Sustainer. He also speaks of submission in marriage (Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18) and concerning children with their parents as well (1 Timothy 3:4).

In all these cases, the word “submission” indicates coverage and protection, and not loss of freedom or self-identity. Being submissive to God guarantees security beyond circumstances, as does submission to authority as taught in the Scriptures; a son to a father, a servant to his master, a woman to her husband. In all cases, a submissive character that recognizes spiritual authority is required. One cannot be submissive to someone who leads a sinful life, since we cannot deny our faith. Ruth knew true submission and the blessing that it brought, and she needed Naomi’s approval and support to undertake the daily challenges (Ruth 2:2). Ruth was submissive as she asked Naomi’s permission to go glean barley and wheat as the poor did.

Most people are used to voicing their decisions, but not to asking permission. God is our supreme authority. How much permission do we ask of Him in the face of our daily routines? After Ruth made the decision to follow Naomi, she promised to obey her (Ruth 3:5-6). When we are willing to obey, we must bear in mind that it will not always be easy, or to our liking. But when we obey according to God’s will, there will be great blessing. Being obedient means not doing things without authorization (Ruth 2:1-3).

So it is with God. Many times we want to do things that come to our mind and we do not ask for God’s authorization, and when we are in trouble, we go to beg for His help. Ruth had the support of Naomi, and obeyed with confidence (Ruth 2:8-12). Being obedient often implies accepting the instructions even if we do not understand them at the moment (Ruth 3:1-11). What Naomi told Ruth to do was a custom of the time. No doubt at that time it was not easy for Ruth to obey, but she had made the decision to be obedient and submit and trust in the spiritual authority that her mother-in-law had. There are people like the pastor of the church, youth leader, teachers, people with experience in the Christian life, etc. who can be considered as spiritual authority.

3. Ruth was rewarded

At the end of the story told in the book of Ruth, we can find a “happy ending” (Ruth 4:9-17). Boaz took Ruth as his wife; this also meant that he “redeemed” her and saved her from loneliness and helplessness as a widow. God greatly blessed Ruth in different areas. Her husband was an entrepreneur who knew how to work the land. She received a house and a family. She enjoyed the blessing of having his first child, who would later be the grandfather of King David, from whose offspring Jesus would be born, the Savior of the world.

The fruit of obedience is no small thing. This should motivate us to have a greater commitment to God and be obedient to Him. It is time for serious and thoughtful decisions, not emotional and short-term commitments. God is faithful. God knows every weakness, knows the circumstances, and does not like problems to be “fixed” by lying. God wants to help every believer to be convinced that the truth is the best solution to any circumstance. To tell the truth is to say things as they are without hiding anything and without adding personal opinions. By telling the truth, one shows trust in God. The apostle Paul also taught how important it is to speak the truth (Ephesians 4:25).

Review/Apply: As a group and as a conclusion to what has been learned, have the students go over the following personal thoughts about the story of Ruth. (There are no “answers” provided since they are personal conclusions.)

1. Name at least three central teachings extracted from the life and conduct of Ruth.
2. Mention aspects that seem strange to you in this story.
3. Share similarities in the book of Ruth with everyday situations in your life.
4. Share if you have experienced having someone with spiritual authority over your life.
5. If you have a person with spiritual authority over your life, share in what way that blesses you.
6. Did God ever send you to do something and you did not obey? What were the consequences?
7. Have you ever obeyed God without understanding why he asked you to obey him? What were the consequences?

Challenge: Say to your class: During this week, make important decisions. It is time to determine to obey God. It is time to make statements of faith as Ruth did, although it may seem to be an uncertain challenge, although you may not see the complete picture. Do you dare? Think about this during the week and tell God, “do not ask me to leave you, I will go where you are and do what you ask me to do”.

God's Servant

Lesson

24

Jessica Nogales • Spain

Objective: That the students will learn the importance of being obedient to God in becoming genuine, faithful servants.

Memory Verse: ...fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. Esther 4:16



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: A sheet of paper with the following inscription, "I am a woman of Jewish origin and I was an orphan. I lived in exile. I became the queen of a pagan nation. God used me to prevent my people from being exterminated. "
- Instructions: Choose a person to act and give her the paper with the characteristics of the person. Divide the class into two groups. Through charades, the person who received the paper must get one of the groups to discover who she is. The group that first discovers it will be the winner. The character is Esther.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Instructions: Divide the class into two groups and ask one group to write about women who were positively influential, and the other group about women who had a negative influence (they do not have to be from the Bible alone).

Connect

Navigate

Can you imagine that an orphan, in captivity in a foreign country, became the wife of the king of the nation in which she was exiled? It's a little difficult to believe but the truth is that it did happen, and her name is Esther, queen of Persia. This girl lived in Susa, the capital of the empire along with her uncle Mordecai. They belonged to the generation of Jews who were exiled there. Esther became queen due to Queen Vasti's disobedience. In Esther 1:10-2:18, we find the way in which Esther came to the throne. Esther had a mission: God chose her to free her people from death. Why did God choose Esther and not a warrior or someone of a nobler lineage? First, because God does things His way and His thoughts are not ours (Isaiah 55:8); and secondly, because He knew that Esther had the necessary characteristics to fulfill His plan in her life.

1. She was obedient and humble.

When we say the word "obedience," some may not like it, or depending on what it is about, they may be obedient or not. The word obedience is not always liked by everyone. Sadly, it is a principle that is being lost little by little.

(Form two or three groups and ask them to act out a scene of disobedience, it may be to parents, teachers, etc). When Esther was taken to the royal palace, Mordecai asked her not to tell anyone that she was Jewish. She could have let herself be carried away by her emotions or by her decisions; but she did not do it that way. She never revealed her nationality until she had to face Haman, the man who wanted to eliminate the Jews. Esther was obedient. Many times young people try to do things their own way, and in that way rebellion takes over their heart and they do not listen to wise advice. However, one who is obedient receives many blessings like Esther. Let's look at some of the promises that God gives to those who are obedient.

Write each of the biblical passages on pieces of cardboard and hide them, without the students seeing them. Ask them to look for the texts, and then once found, to read and comment on them.

- Exodus 20:6, God will bless you greatly.
- Deuteronomy 11:13-15, God will supply your needs.
- Proverbs 1:33, you will live in peace.
- Proverbs 4:10, you will live long.

Obedience must be voluntary and not obligated. By obeying, we are showing respect towards the person who gave us the order. When we obey God, we are showing Him that we recognize His authority and power above all, and that our worship is sincere.

Read 1 Samuel 15:22 and ask that each student share his or her opinion about the Bible passage.

Another quality Esther had was humility. From the beginning of the book to the end, humility was easily seen in her behavior. When the maidens went to see the king for the first time, they had to prepare themselves as well as possible. They were allowed to ask for everything they wanted for their meeting with the king. When Esther's turn came, she did not ask for anything; on the contrary, she let the king's servants choose what she would wear (Esther 2:15). Even as a queen she did not forget who she was and where she came from, and when her people were in danger, she was willing to help them. What God seeks in His children is a humble heart. Humility will help us to be obedient, not only to God, but to any other authority. The humble can listen to advice and then make good decisions. Look up the following Bible quotes about humility and talk about it.

- Proverbs 15:33, humility comes before honor.
- Philippians 2:3, we should not be boastful.
- Colossians 3:12, we must dress with humility.
- 1 Peter 5:5, God is pleased with the humble.

2. She acted with faith and courage.

This point is very important. While it is true that God is not mentioned in the entire book, it is understood that she believed in Him and sought Him because she was Jewish. Although Esther was in the empire as queen, she held on to her faith in the Lord. Her faith empowered her to make a sacrificial decision because her hope was placed in God and not in human hands (Esther 3:7-4:17). She knew where her soul was going if she died.

It is like when Peter tried to walk on water (Matthew 14:22-32). While looking at his Master, everything was fine, but when he turned his gaze away from Him, he began to sink. When we walk looking at God, we can do wonderful things and overcome all trials. If we do not trust in the Lord, we can never do great things, nor will we be able to sacrifice everything for Him. In Hebrews 11:1 it says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Form groups among your students and ask them to write the text of Hebrews in their own words. According to an online dictionary, "certainty" means, "Sure knowledge and clarity. Firm adherence of the mind to something knowable, without fear of erring." Seeing this definition, we understand why Esther decided to give everything; she trusted that her God was not going to fail her. A servant of God lives by faith. Despite knowing that she could lose her life, Ester remained firm. While it is true that at first she may have doubted, she decided to be part of those who make history. And when I say "she decided", it means that she was convinced of what she had to do. No one could change her mind anymore.

It is easy to be seduced by the world; little by little it is gaining ground in the lives of many. Only the strong are able to make a difference because only they are willing to pay the price of being a child of God. No matter what happens, their faith is so great that it drives them to act courageously. We must arm ourselves with courage. We must show that Christ is the Lord and we are his servants. Let's make history in this land to which God has brought us, because He has a purpose for our life.

Ask them to read Joshua 1:9, and answer: How does this apply to my life today?

3. She sought God's direction.

When we want to reach an address and we do not know the place, we use different tools such as maps, Internet, GPS, etc. That way we can go safely and take less time. The same goes for our lives. We must seek God's direction for everything. Esther did it and she ordered all the Jewish people to fast, and she did the same. She was brave and trusted God. She needed God to support her in everything she was doing (Psalm 127:1). Esther wanted to make sure that her God would accompany her, and that if she died before the King, God would be there to pick her up in His arms. Finally, God's plans were fulfilled in the life of Esther. God used her and blessed her life and His people. She was queen of Persia, but above all, she was a servant of God.

Review/Apply: Mix up the passages and characteristics below and then give some time for the students to find the passages and match them to the characteristics described.

- Passages: Proverbs 1:33; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 11:1; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 127:1
- Characteristics: Courage, Faith, God's guidance, Obedience, Humility

Challenge: Say to your class: Never think that you cannot do what God is asking you to do. You are his servant, He trusts you, and knows you can do it. God has wonderful plans for your life, and they will only come true if you seek His will and let yourself be guided by Him. At this time, surely God is asking you to do something. Think about that this week and accept the challenge that God is putting in front of you now and remember, you are more than a conqueror.

Abigail - Smart and Beautiful

Lesson

25

Natalia Pesado • USA

Objective: The student will understand the value of serving with wisdom and humility.

Memory Verse: *His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman.* 1 Samuel 25:3



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk.
- Instructions: Ask the entire class to write down a list of ways they can serve God. They should be things they are doing or could do (not limited to service in the church). After making a list of about ten or fifteen tasks, ask if they think that any of the services described seem more important than others in the eyes of God. Challenge them to think of creative ways to serve God and to pay attention to our attitude as we serve.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk.
- Instructions: With the help of your students, write a list of approximately five negative attitudes that a person may have (discouragement, frustration, fear, criticism, feeling of obligation, etc.); Be sure to give a brief definition of each mentioned attitude so that each student understands the concept clearly.
Then, next to each attitude, write down possible results of serving God with that attitude in your heart (for example: discouragement = discouragement in others, lack of desired results, failure to try, disillusionment with God, etc.). It is very possible that the results will be repeated from one attitude to another, but encourage your students to consider the emotional and spiritual cost of each attitude mentioned.

Connect

Navigate

1. Abigail's situation

Abigail's story is told in 1 Samuel 25. Abigail's husband was Nabal, a man known for his wealth and possessions (1 Samuel 25:2). They lived in Maon, which was on the south side of the Dead Sea. In those times, the amount of land and animals that a person possessed were of great importance, since it allowed them to exchange animal skins and wool for other products necessary for daily life. In addition to his material wealth, the Bible also speaks of Nabal's personality, that he "... was surly and mean in his dealings" (1 Samuel 25:3). A servant described him as "a man so perverse that there is no one to speak to him" (v. 17) and his wife said that he was a perverse and foolish man (1 Samuel 25:25). Also the passage tells us that Nabal would get drunk (1 Samuel 25:36). The name Nabal signifies in Hebrew "crazy, a stupid or bad person" (Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 2. CNP, USA:1991). p.260).

We can assume that the decisions and "bad deeds" of Nabal affected his wife Abigail, and that more than once, they saddened her. We can be sure too that Nabal's behavior and attitude were not pleasing to God.

On the contrary, the author describes Abigail in a simple way, "a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance" (1 Samuel 25:3). The rest of Abigail's personality and qualities will be studied later when analyzing her attitude to the difficult situation in which her husband placed her and her family.

David, who had already been anointed as king, but was fleeing because Saul wanted to kill him, lived with his men nomadically in the desert of Paran, and occasionally asked for food from some of the people in the

area in exchange for the protection he provided for them. When he asked Nabal for food, (vv. 10-11) Nabal showed contempt for David and his father Jesse, and compared him to a slave who had escaped from his owner. He selfishly denied David's request for food for himself and his men. Faced with this denial, David, a strong man of character and ready for battle, decided to take revenge for Nabal's lack of kindness, and declared that he planned to harm him (1 Samuel 25:21-22). Abigail found out about this threat.

2. Abigail's attitude

When Abigail heard the situation, she acted quickly, wisely and humbly. In the first place, Abigail organized her servants to prepare food and send it as a request of forgiveness and peace to David. The passage tells us that "Abigail did not waste time. Immediately she sent David two hundred loaves of bread, two leather bowls full of wine, five roasted sheep, forty kilos of roasted grain, a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred fig loaves" (1 Samuel 25:18, TLA). Abigail acted quickly and diligently to help her husband and protect her family. She did not let herself be carried away by laziness or fear.

Second, Abigail acted wisely in planning how to communicate with David (1 Samuel 25:19). Abigail recognized that as a woman, it was not wise to go alone to appear before David, who was very angry with Nabal and ready to go to battle. Abigail first sent the food that David and his men needed so she could have the opportunity to speak with him more calmly. In this way, we see that Abigail acted with great discernment and intelligence. Finally, Abigail acted with respect.

She gave David respect as a leader in authority. "When she saw him, she got off the donkey and bowed to the ground" (1 Samuel 25:23, TLA), contrary to the attitude of contempt that her husband Nabal had taken. The words she used indicate humility and recognition of David as the future king of Israel, favored by God. She also told David about the importance of divine justice and God's firm desire not to shed innocent blood (1 Samuel 25:24-31). Being guided by God's principles, a woman can help a man in leadership to make wise and just decisions. (Remember that at that time, the role of a woman was little appreciated and valued.) Truly God was guiding Abigail's words as she served God with an irreproachable attitude, in such a way that her name was written in the Bible. She showed that with her trust and dedication to God, she had qualities worthy of praise: diligence, wisdom, generosity, humility, etc. We can ask God to help us develop these same qualities in our lives.

3. Abigail's reward

In 1 Samuel 25:36-43, we see the reward Abigail received for her faithfulness to God. After her encounter with David, Abigail returned home and found her husband Nabal at a "king's banquet" (1 Samuel 25:36), with an abundance of food and wine. Abigail decided not to talk at the moment with Nabal about what had happened that day. Once again, she demonstrated wisdom in choosing an appropriate time to avoid misunderstandings and conflict in her marriage. The next day, when Abigail told Nabal what happened, "At that time, God caused Nabal to have a heart attack, ... ten days later he had another, and he died" (1 Samuel 25:38 TLA). This story tells us the tragic end of Nabal's life. We see that God did not overlook Nabal's bad behavior towards others, and that he suffered serious consequences. It is probably difficult to understand and accept that God Himself caused Nabal to get sick from the heart; however, we must recognize that the Bible warns us, through Paul, that "God cannot be mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Review/Apply: Ask your class to complete the following chart describing a situation they have experienced in their own lives. If they would like, they can share it with the rest of the class. This is an example.

My situation - Cannot get good grades in school

My attitude - Keep studying, find a tutor to help

My reward - Pass the class/graduate.

Challenge: Say to your class: What was Abigail's attitude that most impacted you? Do you feel the desire to have that attitude in your own life? Take this opportunity to ask God to help you develop that attitude in yourself with the help of His Holy Spirit; there's nothing impossible for God. Do not let time pass this week - put this attitude into practice now.



Leadership Worth Imitating

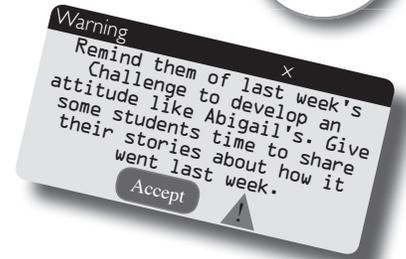
Lesson

26

Yeri Nieto • Mexico

Objective: That the students will learn that Christian leadership means always being available to God and others.

Memory Verse: *'Certainly I will go with you,' Deborah said.* Judges 4:9a



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencils for each student
- Instructions: Ask them to draw a simple drawing of a person. Next ask: How can a Christian be distinguished from those who are not? Allow time for them to add the specific characteristics to the drawing to make them a "Christian."

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard, chalk.
- Instructions: Write "CHRISTIAN" on the board. Ask them to write a verb to describe what a Christian does (love, pray, fast, etc.). Encourage everyone to write until they have exhausted all their ideas. It is important for young people to realize that it is very complex to describe a Christian for what he/she does. It is often easier to define it based on what one does not do (do not smoke, do not drink alcohol, etc.).

Connect

Navigate

The Bible tells about a woman who was a judge in Israel, the only woman who exercised this practice (Judges 4-5.) Today we will study about her and how she used her life as an example that can help us in our Christian walk. Deborah served as judge in Israel. Her husband was Lapidot. The Scriptures present her as a woman with prophetic power and as the author of at least one song, The song of victory that she sings with Barak in Judges 5.

1. Do not underestimate your youth.

It is important to consider her role as a judge, because at that time (1180 BC), Jewish culture considered women as "second class,"

God does not choose leaders according to our prejudices, our norms or our logic; the Bible shows us an example of this in Judges 4. The Lord gave the Israelites into the hands of the Canaanite king Jabin, because they had done evil in His eyes (Judges 4:1-2). During that time, a woman ruled in Israel. She exercised her office in the mountain of Ephraim and the Israelites went up to see her so that she would give them her judgment (Judges 4:5). Debora was a person ahead of her time.

In some societies and even in some churches, we also let ourselves be guided by our norms and prejudices. We do not believe that God wants to use certain people. In the New Testament we read that Paul exhorted Timothy as follows, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young" (1 Timothy 4:12). We can apply the same principle to our life. No one should look down on young people because God wants to raise them up with power to lead this generation to Christ. Today, there is a need for young people to be reached. God longs to raise young people up with power to point out sin, to be instruments of the redeeming grace of God and to lead different groups. God desires youth that exercise their gifts to minister to people who do not know God. In today's story, we see that Deborah showed herself to be an exemplary leader for the time she lived. With God's help, she managed to bring liberation to her people.

2. Exercise your leadership

Not only was Deborah a leader who told others what they needed to do, but then she told Barak (an Israeli army general) what God was going to do through him and his army. Barak asked her to accompany him



(Judges 4:8). Deborah took action, got up, and went with him. The best leadership we can exercise is when we are willing to help, to be at the forefront of what we propose. Deborah gave the challenge and also the example.

Ask and discuss: Are we willing to leave our comfortable places to change the world? Do we want people to know Christ? Do we prepare programs to attract non-Christians? Do we care for our testimony so that people know Christ? How many of us are recognized leaders at school, at work, at the business, on the block where we live, etc?

Deborah got up and went with Barak. She had an intimate relationship with God, and her leadership was not limited to “giving advice and prophecy” from the Lord. She accompanied Barak to the war against Jabin, the Canaanite king. A female leader fighting face to face against the enemy.

Today we need young people with that conviction and firmness, faithful to God with a desire to learn and serve. God raised up a woman who maintained fellowship with Him, and in the same way God will do it today with young people who maintain intimacy with Him. Deborah was a woman and wife and her culture made it impossible for her to be a leader and go to war, but her story shows us that God performs great deeds through people who are willing to be guided by Him.

God wants to use young people to change this generation that is lost without Christ. The means of communication and our culture may indicate the opposite, but the God of Deborah is the same God as ours, who wants to guide us and send us into society to transform it. With the victory that Israel obtained in the battle, it had peace for forty years (Judges 5:31). God wants to raise up young men and women who are His instruments of peace, love and justice.

3. Before and after the war

Deborah agreed to go with Barak to war (Judges 4:9), and made clear two teachings that we should consider. The first is: Deborah never thought about taking the glory of victory. The world is accustomed to giving honor to the one who does the glamorous work (the most famous of a football team is the scorer), but in the Christian life, it is not the same. The glory, the honor, and all the credit goes to the only one who gives us the victory: God. He is the only person for whom we exist; thanks to Him, we have the abilities to do what we do. Deborah clarified to Barak that it would not be their names that would stand out at the end of everything, but it would be the Lord who already had in His plans the way in which he would give them the victory (vv 6-7,9,14). That is a wonderful principle of Christian leadership: All honor should be for the Lord.

Guide your students with the following questions: Can you imagine the temptation that it was for a woman to be recognized as a leader? Can you imagine the opportunity that Deborah had to tell the Jewish men that she was in charge? Can women exercise the same ministries as men? Surely it was a possible temptation! But she did not. Deborah knew that God put her there to be His instrument.

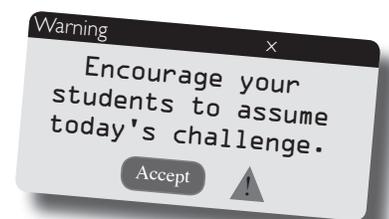
The second teaching is: A woman raised up another woman. Jael was Heber’s wife. Although he was an ally of King Jabin, she was not. When the war was at its height, the Bible narrates that Sisera (commander of the enemy army) fled (Judges 4:15). Deborah had prophesied that Sisera would fall into the hands of a woman. This commander fled to Jael’s tent. And he thought he would be safe, because Heber was a man loyal to Jabin, so he thought his wife was trustworthy. Furthermore, warriors would never think of going in to look for him in a woman’s tent (Judges 4:17). Jael had the life of Commander Sisera in her hands, and she did not waste time in killing him (Judges 4:18-21).

God used Deborah to prophesy about the work of another woman. God can use young people so that, through their ministries, they can raise other young people.

Guide the conversation with the following questions: Do you think God can use young people to reach thousands of young people? Do you believe that God can use you to impact thousands of others so that they are also used by Him? How do you think this will happen? What can you offer to do for others to reach Christ? God wants to use young people who have the same characteristics, speak their language and are in the places where they work and study. They will be the ones to present them to Christ. God wants to use young people and confirm the mission: To call this generation of young people to a dynamic life in Christ.

Review/Apply: Allow time for the students to write biblical leadership characteristics represented among those in the class. Possible answers: wisdom, guidance from God, etc.

Challenge: Say to your class: Reflect on your current situation regarding ministry or leadership in the areas that you live in on a daily basis (school, work, home, etc.) Today you can start being a role model for the people around you. Put your life at God’s disposal and the people who need you. Ask God to give you the necessary abilities to be a good leader.



At the Master's Service

Lesson 27

Walter López • Guatemala

Objective: That the students learn that serving God is unconditional.

Memory Verse: *Some women were watching from a distance... In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.* Mark 15:40a- 41



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper, pencil, tape and blackboard.
- Instructions: Write the word SERVICE on the board. Give each group member a paper and ask them to write an idea that comes to mind when they read the word "service". Then ask them to stick the paper on the board. The amount of words they write should serve as an example to illustrate that "service" means many opportunities.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Handkerchiefs and chairs.
- Instructions: Divide the class into groups of two. One member of each group will be blindfolded. The challenge will be for the members of the other group to lead their blindfolded partners through the classroom, or other place, without tripping over chairs or other blindfolded partners.

Service to God involves attending to the needs of people and guiding them to help them avoid setbacks and obstacles in their lives.

Connect

Navigate

The story of Mary Magdalene told in the gospels is an example of self-denial and service. Regrettably, literary works such as "The Last Temptation of Christ" by the writer Nikos Kazantzakis and "The Da Vinci Code" by Dan Brown have distorted her figure. Biblically, there are no elements that offer a view of Mary Magdalene such as that presented by these authors. Their stories are fictional and have no biblical or historical foundation. The gospels, on the other hand, depict Mary Magdalene as a woman dedicated to the service of Jesus.

1. An encounter with Jesus

The Bible does not describe Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene, but it does indicate that she was freed from evil spirits. In Luke 8:1-2, we read that Jesus was accompanied by the disciples and some women among whom was Mary Magdalene from whom seven demons had been cast out. Luke does not offer more details regarding the origin of Mary Magdalene. Even outside the previous account and the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 27:56-61; 28:1; Mark 15:40-47; 16:1-9, Luke 24:10, John 19:25, 20:1-18), there is no more information about her origin. Although it is not detailed how her release from demons happened, it is evident that the encounter with Jesus changed her life forever.

The miracle that Jesus worked in her opened a perspective of life beyond what she had imagined. Evil spirits affect a person in all areas: Physical, moral, spiritual and social. This condition makes it impossible for the person to show compassion, love, respect, openness to God, etc. This type of person is alienated and does not act on their own account; they are the property of the spirit who has them enslaved. They are not capable of thinking for themselves, they are dominated by the one who owns their heart, in this case the devil.

Additionally, the situation of women in Palestine during the time of Jesus was deplorable. They were confined to anonymity and relegated to low status by society. As a woman, Mary Magdalena was no stranger to this situation, and had to deal with it. In the first place, she overcame the prejudices of her time. As a woman, she could not enter the synagogue or speak with a teacher of the law or Pharisee. However, she followed the Lord despite the cultural barriers.

Second, she understood Jesus' message and walked toward freedom by serving the Lord even with her limited resources (Luke 8:2-3). Mary Magdalene was liberated from the cultural and religious bondage of her time.

This serves as a teaching to the Christian community regarding the importance of the participation and inclusion of women in the ministries and activities of the church. Jesus opened the door to anyone who wanted to serve



him with a whole and grateful heart. Today we can say that there is no impediment except our own will. Jesus gave Mary Magdalene the opportunity to meet him and follow him. From that moment she dedicated her life to the Lord permanently. She served him with all her heart and without reservations. Her service was so fervent that her name is mentioned in the four gospels.

2. Following as service

In the introduction we heard that there are no historical references to Mary Magdalene's origin. Erroneously some have related her to the woman who had the reputation of a sinner who poured perfume on Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-39) or with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11); others have described her as a former prostitute. To top it off, in their respective novels Kazantzakis and Dan Brown relate Mary Magdalene romantically to Jesus. However, none of these images is close to the biblical text. They are all false! Mary Magdalene as described in the gospels is worthy of admiration. In Mark 15:40-41, he says that Mary Magdalene and two other women followed and cared for Jesus in Galilee. She followed Jesus not simply in a contemplative but participatory way that implied service, and should motivate us to reflect on what it means to serve Jesus.

Question: What does it mean to serve and attend to Jesus? It means seeing the needs of the world, the poor, the elderly, the widow and the despised (Matthew 25:40). If we honor them, we honor His name. Jesus teaches us to serve in our church and community using our strengths and resources.

3. Service is a mission

Mary Magdalene followed Jesus from the time she was freed from the evil spirits. She was at Jesus' service at very important times. In John 19:25, it says that several women were next to the cross, among them Mary Magdalene, and in Mark 15:47, it says that Mary the mother of Joseph and Mary Magdalene were near the tomb where Joseph of Arimathea placed the body of the Lord. When Jesus was placed in the tomb, Mary Magdalene, along with other women, prepared to bring aromatic spices to the tomb (Mark 16:1-2). While the disciples were hiding, the women took on this responsibility. They fearlessly went to render a last service to the Lord without knowing that they would witness a great event: The Resurrection! (Mark 16:3) No matter the time of the morning or weight of the stone, she was there (Mark 16:3).

How admirable is that faith! Sometimes it is hard for us to arrive early at Sunday school or the morning service. Mary Magdalene gave us an example of responsibility and availability. There was no reason or excuse to discourage her from being attentive to serving Jesus. This availability was rewarded by God when she saw the risen Christ with her own eyes. This was an extraordinary fact. The first eyewitnesses of the resurrection were not one of the 12 disciples, not even sympathizers of Jesus; they were the women, among them Mary Magdalene. God rewarded the consistency, the disposition, the virtue and the service that she offered him. She was the first spokesperson for the good news to the disciples. Jesus is alive! (Mark 16:11)

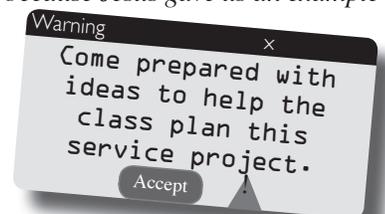
The example of Mary Magdalene teaches us that service also means announcing the Good News. It's not just about helping and collaborating in the church. Announcing the gospel is part of our service as Christians. The service that Mary Magdalene offered to the Lord was at all times. Once she met him, she followed him to the last: his crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. She was the one who brought the news to the disciples that Jesus was alive (John 20:18). Mary Magdalene had to overcome the gender prejudices that existed in her time. She did not limit herself to listening to Jesus or following him from afar, but she committed herself to the cause of Jesus by supporting his ministry in every way. This represents a vindication of women in the Christian community.

At present, some churches restrict the service of women in leadership positions. Some women still live with the idea that institutions should be run only by men. We have seen that Jesus gave women the opportunity to serve him, even in a context hostile to them. The example of Mary Magdalene must inspire women to break these cultural paradigms, and we must serve unconditionally regardless of whether we are men or women.

Review/Apply: Ask your class to answer the following questions. We've included some possible answers.

1. Did Jesus prevent women from following him? (Luke 8:2-3) *No, Jesus included the women and allowed them to help in the ministry.*
2. What happened in the life of Mary Magdalene that prompted her to serve Jesus in such a selfless way? (Luke 8:2) *Jesus, cast seven evil spirits out of her.*
3. How do you think our service to the Lord should be? *In a holistic way that not only looks for the needs of the church but for people in vulnerable conditions.*
4. Do you think that women should take the responsibility of being leaders in the church? *Yes, because Jesus gave us an example even in a very masculine society.*
5. How do you apply the example of Mary Magdalene to your life?

Challenge: Say to your class: Let's set a date as a class to visit a nursing home and clean up the place and serve the people there like Mary served Jesus. We can collect and take personal hygiene items and organize a fellowship meeting with some food to share with them.



Phoebe: Worthy of Gratefulness

Lesson

28

Eudo Prado • Venezuela

Objective: That the students will understand that we must be grateful to those who serve in the church.

Memory Verse: *God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.*
Hebrews 6:10



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Materials to make a bookmark .
- Instructions: Ask students to design a bookmark that includes a drawing or picture that represents Christian service and that has the word “Servant” or “Helper” written on it. Also ask them to write Hebrews 13:16 on the bookmark. At the end of the class, ask that they give it to someone in the church to thank them for their service.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Fine color markers and sheets of poster-board.
- Instructions: Divide the class into two groups. One group should draw an open hand with the title: “The Servant’s Hand” and the other a closed hand, with the title: “The Indifferent Hand”. Each group will note five characteristics or attitudes that they consider appropriate to their respective titles and write them on their drawing. Have each group explain the characteristics.

Connect

Navigate

God designed the church to be a family that helps one another. All believers have the “duty” to serve others, according to the example of our teacher, Jesus, who “came not to be served, but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). However, God put in the hearts of some Christians in particular the strong loving disposition to help others with their needs. They exercise this function permanently as their way of serving God. The Bible teaches us to show gratitude to those who serve in the church and to hold them in high esteem. In the world we live in, it unusual to find people who are willing to help others in a unselfish way. The Bible teaches us that service is a characteristic of the Christian life. It also tells us many unique stories of people who invested their lives to meet the needs of others. Although we are not told much about Phoebe, what little is said about her gives us an understanding that she was an extraordinary woman. Her name means “pure”. She was held in high esteem by the church and church leaders. Her way of serving others, without a doubt, was a very influential and inspiring lifestyle.

1. Those who serve have a life out of the ordinary.

Nowadays, people live focused on their own needs. When someone offers to help, generally they expect to receive something in return. Service to others as a way of life is out of the ordinary.

Guide the class to think of people they know who have the characteristics of being servants. Surely not many. Also, guide them to remember the times they have been helped by others when they have had a need. Ask: What motivated those people to help? Did they expect to receive a favor as a reward or did they do it selflessly? Do you remember a time when you helped someone?

Phoebe is named in Romans 16:1 as a “deaconess” of the church. This word in the original Greek means “servant”. In the New Testament, the word applied to women who, having been called by God and commissioned by the church, exercised the permanent function of helping others in need. When men exercised this function, they were called deacons. These people did not receive any kind of payment for their work. The church dedicated itself to care for the needy, because one of the central principles that the apostles taught was the Christian duty to help the poor, “They only asked us to remember the poor; which I also sought diligently to do” (Galatians 2:10).

Guide the group with these questions: Does the church today care enough for people in need? Is the responsibility to serve others clearly taught and carried out?



Phoebe probably engaged in caring for widows who were elderly, providing them with food and clothing in the name of the church. Also, she helped people affected by diseases and other causes. This required a lifestyle of great devotion and sacrifice. Her ministry put others' comfort before her own. Ask: Would you be willing to do a similar service if you had the opportunity? What things in your life would you have to change to develop a ministry of service? Offer an opportunity for several to express their opinion.

2. Those who serve touch many lives with the love of Christ.

Relationships in the church should be characterized by service, motivated by Christian love. "Serve one another in love" (Galatians 5:13). There is never a shortage of people in need. In our own neighborhood or community and in other places in the city, there are people who need our help. That is why we will always have opportunities to serve. Unfortunately, often we do not see the suffering of others, although sometimes they are very close!

Phoebe was a woman who had "helped many" and the apostle Paul himself (Romans 16:2b). Paul had many material needs and sufferings, mostly during his imprisonment. He testified that he could count on Phoebe's help on several occasions. Without a doubt, this woman had touched innumerable lives with the love of Christ, expressing it through her service.

If we allow ourselves to be used by the Lord for His honor and glory, we can have a positive influence on many lives. Young people are sometimes tempted to use a lot of their time and resources for their own gratification. Christian values teach us that we have much to offer of ourselves to others. God expects us to serve others; this is pleasing in His eyes and He blesses us for it.

Ask the students to read Hebrews 13:16, "And do not forget about doing good and mutual help; because of such sacrifices God is pleased." The word "sacrifice" here indicates an offering or act of worship to God. Explain that service to other people is considered in the Bible as a form of worship of the Lord. Therefore, it does not necessarily refer to people who have an office church title or leadership within the church. It is a quality that every Christian must have.

3. Those who serve also need us.

Many times gratitude is not expressed to those who serve in the church. These people, even when they show great strength and encouragement when they help others, sometimes also go through deep needs. Even more, some go through great personal crises. That is, the people who serve in the church are not beings from another world, nor are they "iron".

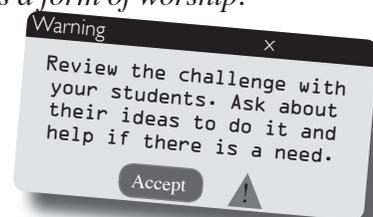
For some reason, perhaps personal, Phoebe had to travel to Rome. The apostle Paul felt that the help of the church would be extremely necessary for her. For this reason, he instructed the congregation to help Phoebe, "that you receive her in the Lord," Romans 16:2a. That is, they should receive her as part of the family of God. According to the Bible, being "brothers in the faith" represents a link much deeper than any other. "And on all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond" (Colossians 3:14). Christian love makes it possible for us to feel like a family with the other members of the church. In addition to Christian love, we should care about the people who serve in the church and have a logical sense of gratitude, "and help her in whatever she needs of you; because she has helped many, and myself" (Romans 16:2b). People who serve others give themselves up, sacrifice their own time and resources, and many times only receive in return forgetfulness and indifference at times when they most need help.

Encourage the class to think of different ways they can show interest, affection, recognition, etc. for the needs of the people who serve in the church. Promote dialogue so that the class freely expresses their ideas.

Review/Apply: Based on the lesson, allow time for the students to answer the following questions:

1. What does deaconess mean? *To serve.*
2. What does Galatians 5:13 teach? *We must serve one another.*
3. What attitude should we have toward other church members? *Service*
4. What biblical principle about servanthood is found in Hebrews 13:16. *Serving is a form of worship.*
5. Besides serving what other attitude should we have regarding other's needs in the church? *Gratefulness*

Challenge: Say to your class: Let's plan a practical way to show appreciation to the people who serve in the church. It could be organizing a party for them, preparing personal gifts for them, or another appropriate form of recognition.



A Compassionate Woman

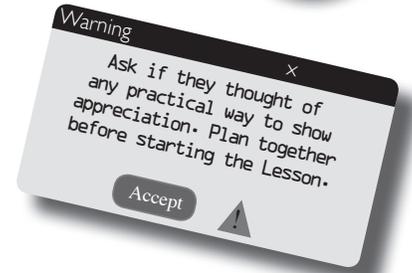
Lesson

29

Zeida Lynch • USA

Objective: That the students understand that Christian living can be demonstrated through helping those in need.

Memory Verse: *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha; she was always doing good and helping the poor.* Acts 9:36



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Old newspapers, scissors, stapler, tape, etc.
- Instructions: Form groups depending on the number of students. Indicate that they have five minutes to prepare two pieces of winter clothing with the items given to them, and dress one of the people in their group. After they have completed the task discuss the following questions. What is needed to make a garment? Why is it important to have adequate clothes for the season? Guide the conversation about what the weather is like in different place and how many people do not have the appropriate clothes for the season.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard, markers and newspaper clippings about the activity of charitable organizations in your community or country. For example, Rotary Club, Telethon, etc.
- Instructions: Ask the class to write a list on the board of charitable organizations they know. Then, ask if any of them have done any type of charity work within the church, school or any other organization. Ask them to share their testimony.

Connect

Navigate

Throughout history, there have always been women who excelled in their service to God and the church. During this unit we have studied some of them like Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Loida and Eunice, among others. They are remembered because they are worth imitating. Today we will study about a woman, who with her service to others, showed the love of God. Her name in Greek is Dorcas. In the Aramaic language her name is Tabitha. Her name means “gazelle”. Many details about her life are not known, but in the book of Acts we can find three qualities that are worthy of imitation.

1. Dorcas was a disciple of Jesus.

The first characteristic that Acts 9:36 tells us about Dorcas is that she was a disciple. This means that she was a Christian. She had recognized Jesus as the Son of God and as the Savior of her life. She lived in the Port of Joppa near the Mediterranean Sea. Due to the persecution against Christians in Jerusalem, many followers of Christ fled to different places. They preached and shared the message of salvation in every new place they came to. It is in this way that she started the church in Joppa. Joppa was located 55 kilometers northwest of Jerusalem and became a very important center for the spreading of the gospel during the early church. Dorcas possibly knew about Jesus in the church of Joppa and received teachings about what the Christian life should be like. According to Acts 2:42-47, the characteristics taught and practiced in the early church were the study of the Scriptures, perseverance in doctrine, enjoyable communion with one another, participation in prayer and the breaking of bread. They also shared what they had to meet the needs of others. Dorcas was taught in this way. Her testimony was well-known to others because she was recognized by all as a disciple of Jesus. Her relationship with Christ was strong. Dorcas showed the change that Christ made in her life in practical ways. She understood that she was called to do good works on behalf of her neighbor. It is necessary to emphasize that Dorcas' faith in Jesus was her motivation to help the needy.



2. Dorcas was a compassionate woman.

The next characteristic we can learn about Dorcas is that she was a woman who “abounded in good works and alms.” In Acts 9:39, we find that when Dorcas died, people, especially widows, brought the clothes she had sewn for them to her house. Today there are many organizations or ministries that are dedicated to doing compassionate works that use her name.

Dorcas showed compassion for widows and possibly also for orphaned children. Dorcas observed people’s needs and acted generously to satisfy them. She not only gave money, but also invested time and labor in preparing something that would help others. When Luke mentions that Dorcas was full of good deeds, he refers to Dorcas being good at doing good. Her service to others flowed from a heart that was grateful to God for His saving grace.

One commentator points out that the gazelle is distinguished by its slender and beautiful form, as well as by its graceful movements and bright eyes. Between the Hebrews and the eastern nations, they consider the gazelle as an image of feminine beauty. The name Dorcas means gazelle, and although we do not know about her physical beauty, we can affirm that she showed the beauty of Jesus. Her compassion towards those who were in need showed the compassion of Jesus. As a disciple, she certainly had faith in Jesus, and at the same time she understood that her faith without works was dead (James 2:14-17).

We can remember when God asked Moses, “what do you have in your hand?” And he answered, “a rod”. (Exodus 4:2). That rod became a symbol of the power of God delegated to Moses.

In the same way, when God asked Dorcas, “what do you have in your hand?” surely she answered “a needle”. God used that needle to show a practical kindness towards the needy, fulfilling Jesus’ teaching regarding responsibility to others. Matthew 25:35, 40 says “for I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me ... Truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

3. Dorcas impacted her community.

The book of Acts narrates that Dorcas became ill and died. Although her age is not mentioned, Dorcas had an active life of service to others. Her lifestyle and service impacted her community. The widows who benefited from her kindness went to her house to mourn, showing the tunics and dresses that Dorcas had given them.

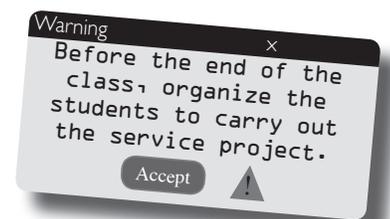
The people of the church in Joppa were also very affected and saddened by Dorcas’ death. When they heard that Peter was in Lida, near Joppe, they sent two people to look for him. Surely they had heard about the miracles that Peter had performed following the example of Jesus. Peter soon arrived in Joppa. Following Jesus’ example when he resurrected the daughter of Jairus (Matthew 9:24-25), Peter asked the people who were accompanying the body to leave. Then he knelt and prayed. Finally, with power and authority Peter said, “Tabitha, get up” and Dorcas came back to life. The church people, widows and possibly orphans present, were greatly surprised!

This miracle had two important repercussions for the community. On the one hand, the faith of the members of the church of Joppa was strengthened. This miracle convinced many about the real power of God.

On the other hand, the news spread throughout the community and many believed in the Lord (Acts 9:42). The testimony of this woman resurrected from physical death came to give spiritual resurrection to many of the people of Joppa. Acts tells us that Peter stayed in Joppa many days and we can easily imagine that he was discipling the new believers and encouraging the church in Joppa.

Dorcas’ life not only impacted her place of origin, but motivated other women to follow her example by offering their talents in the service of God and their neighbors.

Challenge: Tell your class: Together with your classmates, prepare a community service project. For example, visit an orphanage or a hospital for children with terminal illnesses. Prepare something yourself to share with them. For example, sewing or knitting a garment, baking cookies or cake, preparing a drawing that they like, etc.



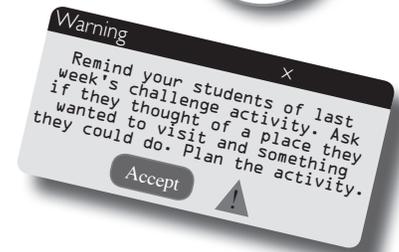
Serving Together

Lesson 30

Esmeralda Cortés • Mexico

Objective: That the students will learn the importance of serving God along with his/her future spouse.

Memory Verse: *A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.* Proverbs 31:10-11



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Strips of material that can be used to tie ankles together. Large objects such as balls, boxes, etc. that can be moved between two people.
- Instructions: Form male-female couples and tie their ankles forming a pair with three legs. Have each couple move objects from one side of the room to the other. Each pair will have their turn and must use different techniques to be able to move the objects and they must do it together. Once all the teams have had a turn, comment who did it faster and how they agreed to fulfill the mission.

When a couple marries it is very important that both know they are united for life and that it is vitally important that they work as a team. Marriage must be for life and both must work and serve as a team.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Sheets with the case studies that do not have an ending.
- Instructions: Form male-female couples, and give each couple a case study and ask them to write the end. You can repeat the cases.
 - Ask each couple to read the case and their ending to the class. After they have all read each case, take a moment and read the real endings.
 - In marriage, both must make every decision to walk according to God's plan. If they are dating and do not have the same calling, they should reconsider their courtship and seek God's will.
- Case 1: Marriage of a year and a half, they have a baby of a few months. They receive an invitation to serve as volunteer missionaries (without salary) in another country. He accepts immediately, she does not want to accept (thinking of the family's economy).
 - ◇ True ending: She prayed, she put herself in the hands of God and they have been serving together in different cities for seven years.
- Case 2: A couple that is dating. He is called to the ministry and is a pastor of a church. She was satisfied with being a member of his church and living close to her parents.
 - ◇ True ending: He stopped pastoring, he returned to her city and served as a layman in a church.

Connect

Navigate

In the Bible there are stories of men and women who obeyed God. Each of their stories teach us something. Today we will study about Priscilla, a Roman woman who served God with her husband.

1. A woman willing to leave everything

In Romans 16, the last chapter of the epistle, Paul sent greetings to several people including Phoebe and also Priscilla and Aquila. Paul recommended that they show care towards Phoebe because she was in need. He also referred to this couple as people who risked their lives for him and therefore blessed the Gentile churches. Paul continued to send greetings to many other people who helped him throughout his ministry, mentioning women, men, couples and families. In this lesson, Priscilla and Aquila are highlighted. Acts 18:2-3 says that Aquila and Priscilla had moved from Italy to Corinth because the Roman emperor Claudius ordered all the Jews out of the country. Their job was to make tents. When they found themselves living in Corinth, they got to know Paul. Paul also made tents. Aquila and Priscilla hosted Paul for a year and a half. They were possibly discipled by him but they also helped to disciple others. Then Aquila and Priscilla went with Paul to Syria (Acts 18:18).



Priscilla's commitment is remarkable. She was willing to follow her husband not only due to his new job but because she wanted to serve God. Moving from one place to another is not always easy. It involves leaving friends, customs and adapting to a new place. Priscilla was willing to do it. Although the details are not known, Paul mentions that Aquila and Priscilla laid out their lives to help him. Priscilla was a woman willing to do everything because she loved God.

2. A woman who disciplined others.

In Acts 18:24-28, Priscilla and Aquila were in Ephesus. They were no longer with Paul, but they continued to serve God everywhere they settled. In Ephesus they met Apollo. Acts 18:24-25 says, "Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John". In the next verse, it indicates that Apollo wanted to teach the message of Jesus in the synagogue and he met Priscilla and Aquila. Acts tells how they did not approach him in front of people to correct his error. Apollo did not know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he only knew about water baptism. Aquila and Priscilla called him aside and helped him better understand God's message. Priscilla and Aquila were willing to help whoever needed it. In this case they disciplined Apollo and prepared him so that he could better carry out his ministry.

Talk with your students about how they would act if they knew someone who was teaching incorrectly in the church, but had a fervent heart for God. This person had not been well disciplined but has the desire to help others. Wait for the students to comment.

Priscilla and Aquila showed the correct example of how to help and strengthen a new believer. This couple's example is very clear. Both worked to bless Apollo.

3. A woman who opens her home.

In the previous points of the lesson, we studied how Priscilla together with her husband were willing to face new challenges to serve God. They moved to different places and disciplined a new leader in the church. 1 Corinthians 16:19 mentions another characteristic of this couple, "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house." This couple had a church in their house. In those times, Christians did not have churches where they could gather to worship God. They met in houses and sometimes they even did it secretly, due to persecution. The place where they opened this house for a church was in a province of Asia. We do not know the name of the city Paul refers to but the connection between them and Paul continued to be strong. This is a new aspect in Priscilla's life, who not only was willing to travel changing her residence, to risk her life, to disciple the new believers, but together with her husband she opened their home to start a church to continue preaching the gospel.

Currently, there are also people who are willing to commit themselves to the development of the church. It is necessary to open preaching points where different people can hear the gospel message. For this it is necessary that people open their homes, give their time and effort so that the gospel continues to spread. Women and especially wives have a very important role in this type of decision. Opening the house for a church is a very important step in the life of the family. This couple set a good example for men and women of unconditional service. Their example encourages couples to commit themselves to the extension of the Kingdom of God. Young people, if we love God, we must be willing to serve Him, wherever, whenever, however. When it comes to forming a home, we must seek a partner that also loves Him and is willing to serve him.

Review/Apply: Ask students to identify the character represented.

1. Roman woman, who together with her husband, made tents. (Priscilla)
2. Jewish man, believer, who lived in Rome before living in Corinth. (Aquila)
3. Apostle who knew the trade of tent making, lived for a time in Corinth. (Paul)
4. Jew, native of Alexandria, eloquent man, powerful in the Scriptures who was instructed in the way of the Lord and began to speak with boldness in the synagogue. (Apollos)
5. Emperor who ordered that all Jews leave Rome. (Claudius)

Challenge: Say to your class: Do you know of a marriage in which both men and women unconditionally serve the Lord? Think of all those couples you know in our church, your area or even your district. If you have an opportunity, meet with them and ask them to tell you how God called them and how it was for each of them to accept.



Heroes of the Faith

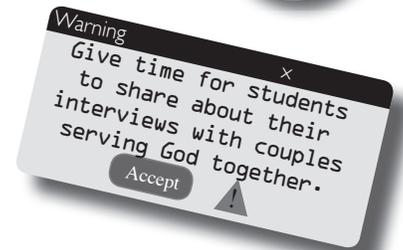
Lesson

31

Leticia Cano • Guatemala

Objective: That the students will learn the value of the legacy of faith they have received from other Christians.

Memory Verse: *I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.* 2 Timothy 1:5



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Group class members in pairs and ask that they be placed facing each other in two parallel rows. Then in turn, a participant will make movements as if he were standing in front of a mirror and the other will simultaneously repeat the movements as if he were the mirror. Duration per couple - 30 seconds maximum. Finish by explaining that our example of daily life affects others positively or negatively.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Construction paper or cardboard, crayons, markers or colored markers, stickers or cutouts of wrapping paper, etc.
- Instructions: Give a sheet to each student so that they can make a card and write a thank-you note in it to give to someone who has been an example in their lives. At the end of the class, each one must give it to that person. It can be a relative or someone from the congregation. This will help the student to appreciate how important it is to recognize the good example of other Christians.

Connect

Navigate

Catalina used to stay with her granddaughters while her daughter went to work. On Sundays, she took her granddaughters to church, where they learned about the Christian faith. Do you remember something important that your grandma taught you? What good things have you learned from your mother? Do you remember who was the person who invited you to come to church? Is there a special person who has influenced your life? Today we will study about women who served God's purposes as grandmothers and mothers

Invite students to read 2 Timothy 1:3-5. If possible, bring different versions to read from. The passage to study today was written during the first century after Christ, possibly from Rome, when Paul was imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. During his preaching ministry, the apostle Paul met many people who shared faith in Christ. He mentions some of these people in his writings, like Timothy and his family.

1. The grandmother

Some grandmothers are wise and others are very naughty. Timothy's grandmother was named Lois. Although not much is known about her, the scant records of her life explain her influence on one of the first young leaders of the early church. Lois was a Jewish woman who, like most of them, dedicated her life to take care of her family while her husband went out to earn what was necessary for family support. Although women did not attend the synagogue as men did, they could learn from the Word of God on the Sabbath days. In addition, with the advent of Christianity, women gathered in prayer and scripture study groups at home (Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15). Taking into account that the opportunities to learn about God were less for women than for men, it is necessary to recognize the great value of faith in God that Grandma Lois had developed. The apostle referred to her as a woman of sincere faith who influenced her grandchild's life in a powerful way. The influence of a grandmother or an older person can mark the life of a young person for good or for bad. There are children who are spoiled because their grandmother gave in to them; others may grow bitter from the unfair scourging and reprimanding of their impatient grandmother. A wise and God-



fearing grandmother can influence her grandchildren and lead them to develop a firm and authentic faith in God.

Ask: Does anyone have a Christian grandmother who encourages them to seek God? Explain the blessing that she is because even if you do not have a fortune to inherit, you have a rich spiritual legacy which is faith in Jesus Christ that saves and gives eternal life. “And since childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which can make you wise for salvation through the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

2. The mother

Her name was Eunice, meaning “good victory”, which can be interpreted as “victorious” or “she who achieves victory”. Eunice was a Jewish woman living in Lystra (Acts 16:1). It is interesting that she married a Greek man, because it was not common for a Jewish woman to marry someone of another nationality. Also at that time the young women did not usually choose who to marry, because the parents did the choosing. So for reasons that are unknown, Eunice married a Greek and together they gave birth to Timothy, who grew up under the influence of two different cultures. Eunice was well taught in faith by her own mother (2 Timothy 1:5). Lois was very efficient in her responsibility to instill faith in God in her daughter, because Scripture says both had a faith that was true, so authentic and so real that it was transmitted from mother to daughter and then to the next generation ... Timothy.

3. The result of teaching by example

Many Christians have such a superficial faith, so they cannot influence even those closest to them. They may influence others, but those who live with them cannot be convinced of the need to believe in Christ and surrender their hearts to God.

The name Timothy means “one who worships God” or “God’s beloved.” Timothy was also young, reckless and helpful. He was seriously committed to the Lord and to the work of the gospel. The lifestyle he saw in his grandmother and in his mother influenced him powerfully. The Bible only mentions that his father was Greek; possibly he was also a Christian or a proselyte of Judaism. Luke mentions in Acts 16:1 that his mother was known to be a believer, which meant she was Christian. Both Lois and Eunice made it clear that they had fervently placed their lives in God’s hands. They effectively served the purposes of God in leading Timothy to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Timothy decided to embrace the faith of these noble women in such a way that he had a good testimony before the believers of Lystra and Derbe. Paul wanted him to be his companion in the mission of preaching the gospel (Acts 16:2-3). Years later when Timothy was serving the Lord as a pastor (1 Timothy 1:3), Paul remembered him with affection for his dedication and consecration to the service of the Lord, and even asked him to visit him in prison (2 Timothy 4:9).

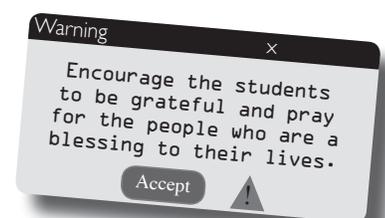
In the church we often encounter the problem of not finding young people who really want to commit themselves to serving Christ. Why do you think young people resist serving the Lord? (Allow time for them to express their opinions). Sometimes people make commitments but only mentally or emotionally.

The Christian’s life is guided by convictions, not only by emotions. Ask: Is there anyone in your family or congregation who inspires you to serve the Lord because of their faithfulness, good testimony and service? (Give your students an opportunity to share about their experiences). What attitude do you have when your help is needed in the church? Do you participate or expect others to do things for you? Do not be just a spectator. Examine your life and Timothy’s example. Ask: Is your faith as sincere as his? If not, you should ask God for forgiveness and change your attitude, because your example affects others.

Review/Apply: Allow time for students to answer the following questions:

1. What aspects of Lois’ and Eunice’s lives caught your attention?
2. How do you think they reacted when the apostle decided to take Timothy along to preach?
3. How would your mother react?
4. How can the church encourage women to take their children to Sunday School?

Challenge: Say to your class: Think of the Christian people who were and are a good example for you now, and praise God for them. Tell them how they have influenced your life. Share the experience next Sunday with your class.



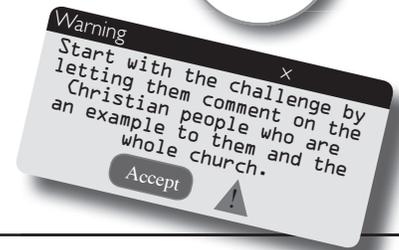
You Shall Have No Other Gods

Lesson 32

Flavia de Ventura • Argentina

Objective: That the students should understand that there is only one God that we must worship.

Memory Verse: *You shall have no other gods before me.* Exodus 20:3



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Sheets of paper, pens or pencils.
- Instructions: Give each student a sheet of paper. Ask them to draw something they can see or touch (an ice cream cone, a book, etc.) on half of the page. On the other half they should draw something that they cannot see or touch (wind, smell, pain, etc.). Is it easier to draw or define something that we can see or touch, rather than something we cannot see or touch? How can we see God if He is invisible? How can we focus our gaze on the true God?

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Sheets of paper and pens or pens.
- Instructions: Form two groups. A group will define in their own words: Auto, pencil, mother, school. The second group will define: Hope, pain, shame, salvation. Is it easier to define something we can see or touch, than something we cannot see or touch? How can we see God if He is invisible? How can we focus our gaze on the true God?

Connect

Navigate

The first commandment given by God says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Anything that wants to look like God or occupy the place He should have in our lives represents an idol that takes what belongs to God. This is a real danger in our lives that has been manifested from the beginning of all humanity. For this reason, the Lord emphatically warned us to remove all indications of idolatry, because those things distance us from Him. The Beacon Biblical Commentary says about the first commandment, “before me” really means “side by side with me” or “in addition to me”. God did not expect Israel to abandon Him; He knew that the danger was that of putting Him on the same level with other gods. This commandment emphasizes the strict monotheism of Judaism and Christianity. The first commandment forbids all kinds of mental idolatry and all disordered affection of earthly and sensible things.” (Beacon Biblical Commentary, Volume 1. USA:1991, p. 239).

1. A unique and jealous God

Usually when we speak of a jealous person, we imagine someone possessive who deprives those they love of freedom and sometimes can hurt or alienate others. However, the jealousy of God is totally different since through His jealousy He wants to protect us from being seduced by the enemy. God does not share His reign; He is the only true God and in this way, He presents Himself by giving the great commandment expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. God declares that He is the only true God, and calls us to love Him with all our heart, soul and strength. God longs to be the only object of worship in our lives.

Think of the emphasis on the word “all” in the verse that says, “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). God also communicated the responsibility for families to perpetuate this teaching to the following generations and to keep it in mind at all times (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). We cannot love God only individually. Our love for God must transcend to all those around us.

Through the history of Christianity, this first commandment was emphasized to the different generations. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this in 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6. The custom at that time was to make offerings to idols, images created by man. Paul emphasized the supremacy of our God.

The same happens nowadays. Periodically society raises a new idol to whom people dedicate their money, time and attention. We see in different cultures and communities how from one day to another a celebrity or leader appears to whom they attribute powers and want to be compared to the divine. What about the popular idols that mostly attract youth? Some people will do anything to see or even touch them. This is something that God detests. Although people want to raise false gods, we must remain firm in who we believe (1 Corinthians



8:5). Although in this land other gods and other lords want to rise, the children of God must know from whom they come and to whom they belong. God does not “compete” with anyone because no one is equal to Him. Deuteronomy 8:11-20 was a warning to the Israelites not to forget the mighty works of God. God was very clear indicating that the consequence to having other gods would be the destruction of the people of Israel. For many it is easier to make a number of personal sacrifices to obtain the attention of their idols and false gods, instead of surrendering their hearts to God, as the psalmist says in Psalm 51:16-17.

Practicing idolatry distances us from God. To have other gods means putting any other thing or person in the place that belongs only to God. A god could be a boyfriend or girlfriend, friends, family, studies, work, entertainment, etc. There are many things that, while still good, get in the way of our relationship with God. Any goal or purpose we have in our life must be rooted in obedience to God.

2. Israel and neighboring lands

For many years Israel was subject to slavery in Egypt to an idolatrous people. Israel, once liberated, did not cease to be related to other neighboring peoples who practiced idolatry. That is why in Deuteronomy 6:13-15 God reminded them, “Even if others practice idolatry, you do not share those customs.” God is jealous; He longs for our exclusivity towards Him. Obviously, God knows the inclination of people who are exposed to bad habits. The need to re-emphasize this first commandment was constant during the journey of the people of Israel to the Promised Land. The Lord needed to remind them again not to look to other gods besides Him, emphasizing the destructive consequences this could have for all the people (Exodus 22:20). God is jealous and does not share His glory with anything or anyone (Deuteronomy 6:14-15).

Having other gods is also a problem today. What are we Christians doing to make a difference? We must live a life that demonstrates there is no one nor nothing that equals His love, power and majesty. There is no one else who has thought of our eternal salvation, and who has given His only son to save us (1 Timothy 2:5).

3. There are other gods among Christians today.

We have already mentioned in the course of the lesson that in our present day, there are other gods. They may be disguised to be attractive to us.

Jesus overcame the temptation that came from Satan who said, “All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship me” (Matthew 4:9). Many times people want to achieve their goals, dreams, and plans without considering what it means for their faith. This temptation is presented very subtly, taking part in our thoughts, money, time and affection, involving our heart, soul and strength, which must belong completely to God (Deuteronomy 6:5). “Jesus answered Satan, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written, Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (Matthew 4:10). Jesus made it clear that for Him, the most important thing was to worship and serve God, His Father.

We need to begin to see with spiritual eyes what the enemy wants to offer us in exchange for taking our attention away from God. Who is our confidence, protection and security? Certain customs such as red ribbons on the arm of a baby, garlic or horseshoes on the doors, etc. indicate that you do not trust God fully for protection. In the same way, if we only trust our happiness to a relationship, a job or money, we are leaving God aside. If we invest our time in study, work, amusements, or pastimes without setting aside time to meditate on God and His Word or go to church, we are indicating the place that God occupies in our life. God is jealous and wants to have all our heart. He longs for us to give our lives and live each day with Him. “For where your treasure is there your heart is also” (Matthew 6:21).

Review/Apply: Help your students answer the following questions:

1. Why does God present himself as a jealous God? *Because He does not share his glory with anyone, and because He wants to take care of His children and keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy.*
2. What is the meaning of the phrase “before me” quoted in the Exodus 20:3 passage? *The phrase “before me” means “side by side with me” or “in addition to me”.*
3. How do we have idols? *When we put other things first in our lives and do not give God the place He deserves.*
4. What example did Jesus Christ give us? *Jesus overcame the temptation by saying that He would only worship and serve God.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Maybe you have not noticed, but many things that are apparently good are taking the place of God. During this week, try to detect what they are, and once you have detected them, ask God for forgiveness in prayer and give him the place that belongs to him. Then, fill your life with the Word of God so that your spiritual eyes may be opened and detect every sign of idolatry that wants to affect you.



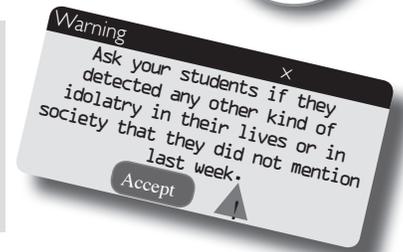
You Shall Not Make Idols

Lesson 33

Walter López • Guatemala

Objective: That the students will understand that worshipping idols or images is offense to God. He deserves all worship and absolute loyalty.

Memory Verse: *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or on the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.* Exodus 20:4-5a



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil
- Instructions: Ask the students to draw an image of a human or animal. Ask them how they would feel paying homage or asking for a miracle from that image. All human creations will die and are finite. Our God is eternal and His majesty transcends wood, paper, gold or any other material.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: One sheet of paper for each student and pencils.
- Instructions: Prepare some cards with the words monotheism, polytheism, pantheism and atheism, and others with the definition of each of word. (Monotheism - worship of one God; Polytheism - adoration of various gods; Pantheism - worship of the universe or world, all creatures are gods; Atheism does not believe in the existence of God.) Form two groups and ask them to match the words to the definitions.

Connect

Navigate

It was not the uniqueness of Israel but the mercy of God that made it the object of His love. In correspondence to that love, the Lord asked for loyalty and dedication by renouncing all other gods. The prohibition of images was always present in the people of Israel. God chose Abraham to whom he gave the promise of making a great nation (Genesis 12:1-2). In the covenant that God established with his offspring years later, He was very emphatic in that regard (Exodus 20:4). The virtue of believing in one God would be what would differentiate Israel from the surrounding peoples. God made a strong call against the worship of other gods and images. Only God is worthy of reverence and adoration because there is no other outside of Him.

1. Images in the Old Testament

The use of images and sculptures to represent the gods was very common among the pagan peoples of the Old Testament. The gods were represented by animal figures (Deuteronomy 4:16-18). The image represented the deity that was worshiped. It was the evidence that showed the favor of the gods to the people. It signified a symbol of protection and closeness. That is why God commanded in the second commandment not to build anything to represent Him or a false god (Exodus 20:4-5).

The second part indicated that in addition, no image should be adored. The restriction of creating images and worshipping other gods was in close proximity to the election of Israel and its call to be light to the nations (Deuteronomy 7:6). The covenant of God established the faithfulness of the people to God. There was a warning that we should consider. In addition to not making images of other gods, Israel should not for any reason, make any image of the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:15-17). The experience between God and Israel in Horeb was auditory. (Deuteronomy 4:12). God demanded the people trust in His Word. The salvific acts in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and the cloud and the pillar of fire, were visible signs of God's grace. The Lord is the creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in it. It is impossible that His majesty and power could be represented and contained in an inert object created by human hands, carried from one place to another, that does not speak, see, hear or breathe (Psalm 135:15-17).

2. Images in the New Testament

The first Christians followed the command given to Israel. The rejection of idolatry can be observed in many passages of the New Testament. For example, when Paul arrived in the city of Athens, he saw with sadness that they practiced idolatry (Acts 17:16). When Paul spoke at the Areopagus he strongly criticized idolatry and told the Athenians that they should not think that God was like gold, silver or stone carved by human hands (Acts 17:24-31).

In Acts 19:23-41, Paul's preaching to the Ephesians resulted in the conversion of many to the gospel. These new converts probably worshiped the goddess Diana (Acts 19:26-27). Paul's preaching was against the cult of the goddess and especially against the business of the artisans who made money building the idols.

In their discontent, the artisans stirred up the people to proceed against Paul's companions. The cult to the image of this goddess Diana generated great gains that were affected by the conversion of the Ephesians to the gospel.

Idolatry was also related to the desire to earn profits by exploiting the people's faith. Christ came to give freedom from that slavery. The two examples show that the use of images in the New Testament is not an evangelical teaching.

3. Images in Christianity

At present there are still religions in the East such as Hinduism and Buddhism that use images to worship their gods. In Latin America, images such as "the holy death" in Mexico; "Maximón" in Guatemala; "Gauchito gil" in Argentina; among others, they are the object of prayers and offerings among their devotees. These last examples belong to religions and sects outside of Christianity. What about the images used in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions? Is the use of images in Christianity valid? Most Protestants are quite intolerant about this issue. There are some considerations to think about before making any value judgment.

The use of images in Christianity goes back to very ancient times. People who could not read or write saw in them the simplest way to learn biblical teaching. It was a way of representing evangelical teaching. Later in the East, the Orthodox Church began to develop images that had their splendor in Byzantine art. Rome had its splendor in Renaissance art with the works of Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci.

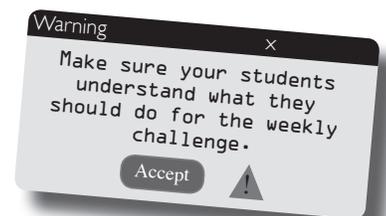
It is true that these images represent a treasure for the history of art and the church, but nothing justifies their veneration. Although at one time the images may have been an accessible way of representing biblical teaching for the illiterate, they eventually took on an importance that does not correspond to them. So, why are they used? There is a crucial difference in explaining why, unlike Protestants, these two Christian traditions use images.

The church was a single one until the Reformation movement of 1517. The Reformation initiated by Martin Luther was distinguished by a return to the Holy Scriptures. This was a determining factor within Protestantism and the use of images. While we pay more attention to writing, Catholics and Orthodox pay more attention to tradition. However, the Bible is very clear in this matter. There is no basis for using images within the liturgy and Christian devotion.

Talk with your students about how many people need to see, touch, and perceive with their senses something to strengthen their faith. For example, people make processions, sacrifices (they walk on their knees, wear a habit for a certain period, light candles, etc.) trying to please God or some saint of their devotion and thus obtain what they want. Psalm 51:17 tells us, "My sacrifice, Oh God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." Encourage your students to seek God with a sincere heart and strengthen their faith in the study of the Word and fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Not infrequently, we Protestants may be too severe in our judgment towards the use of images. Perhaps most do it with a holy zeal because the Bible teaches us not to make images of gold, silver, copper, wood, or plaster. God exhorts us not to bow to them. He warns us against the sin of idolatry. Even though we do not have images of Christ, saints or virgins, we run the risk of using ideological images. Perhaps they are not sculptures or paintings to which we give flowers or prayers, but sometimes, we create mental images of God that turn into harmful ideas and idolatrous practices.

Challenge: Say to your class: It is very important to know the Word of God as a basis for our faith. Also to obey God with wisdom. During the week, memorize the verses studied in class about the second commandment. Write an article explaining why you do not worship images. Use at least three Bible citations. Share it with your friends and talk about it.



Do not Take the Lord's Name in Vain

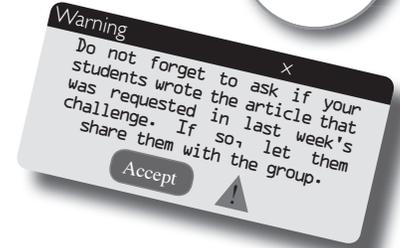
Lesson

Zeida Lynch • USA

34

Objective: That the students will recognize that the sanctity of God's name requires utmost respect.

Memory Verse: *You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.* Exodus 20:7



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Posters with each letter of the alphabet. Include three extra posters for each vowel. Prepare a total of 2 or 3 sets of letters, depending on the number of students. Paper, glue, markers.
- Instructions: Put the letters in a box and ask each student to take five cards and try to put their name together. If you do not have all the letters, draw the ones that are missing and have them make a poster with their decorated name. For each one of us our own name is important. It is what identifies us.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blank sheets and pen for each participant.
- Instructions: Ask each participant to prepare an acrostic using their name, with phrases that reflect their personality.
Each of us gives life to his own name according to his personality.

Connect

Navigate

Talk to your students about expressions they know that mention God's name and under what circumstances they are used. For example, God! Holy God! I swear to God! My Jesus! God bless you! Oh My God! These expressions do not indicate admiration or respect for God. Many times they refer to God in a derogatory way.

1. The names of God

Ask: Does anyone know the names attributed to God? Clarify that there is no name that can describe God. The first time we find reference to God in the Bible is in Genesis 1:1. When analyzing the writing in the original language, the word that appears there is "ELOHIM" which in the original language means power, strength. In the first chapters of Genesis, "ELOHIM" refers to God as the Creator who created everything that exists with His power. At other times, only the word "EL" was used plus another term that enhanced a characteristic of God. In Genesis 14:18-20-22, Abram's nephew Lot was taken prisoner by neighboring nations. Abram went to rescue him and succeeded. Upon his return, he met the priest Melchizedek and gave him the tithes of all he got. Melchizedek blessed him. In that passage, they referred to God as "God Most High" (ELYON) In Genesis 16:7-8; 13, when Hagar waited for Abram's son, she fled from Sarah's presence. On the way, she met an angel who comforted her and encouraged her to return. Hagar referred to God as "The God who sees" (EL RO'I). In Genesis 17:1, God appeared to Abram to confirm his covenant. He asked him to go before Him and be perfect. God changed Abram's name to Abraham and manifested Himself as "God All-powerful" (EL SHADDAI).

Along with ELHOIM, there is another word that also refers to God, but in a more personal way, as a proper name. This is the word YHWH. In English this word is translated as Jehovah. In Genesis 4:26, we find this word, "Then men began to call on the name of Jehovah." In Exodus 3:1-15, in the encounter between God and Moses when He asked him to rescue the Israelites, Moses asked, "what will I answer when they want to know your name?" (Exodus 3:13) God told him "I AM WHO I AM" and "so you will say to the children of Israel: I AM sent me to you" (v. 14). This is a very personal way of referring to God by his name, Jehovah.

2. The name of Jesus Christ

God revealed himself to men in the person of Jesus Christ. Now we can clearly identify the Triune God as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We believe in a God that manifests Himself in three people. In Matthew 1:20-23, the angel told Joseph the identity of the baby Mary was expecting, and

indicated the name Joseph should give Him. The name of JESUS means “He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In Isaiah’s prophecy, the name Immanuel is mentioned, which means “God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). Jesus was also called Christ, which in Hebrew means “the Messiah” or “the anointed one”. Jesus is the Messiah promised to mankind since the fall of Adam and Eve and prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the combination of the two words Jesus and Christ, which means “the anointed one” or “the messiah who saves his people”. The fact is that although we say Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ, we are referring to the same person. Philippians 2:5-11 tells us that the name of Jesus is worthy of adoration and respect because it is God himself, made man. Jesus made our redemption possible. He was the sacrifice necessary for the forgiveness of our sins ... the one in whom we find salvation. We cannot take the name of Jesus in vain.

3. Uses and abuses of the name of God

The Israelites were very aware of the command given by God (Exodus 20:7). The Bible gives some indications regarding the use of the name of God. Psalm 34:1-3 indicates that one must “exalt” the name of God for His wonders. To exalt means to elevate someone or something to great height or dignity. Exalting God is part of our worship; it is the recognition of His greatness and His mercy to us.

Joel 2:32 and Romans 10:13 say that we must “call on” His name for salvation. To “call on” is to make a strong plea for help. To call on the name of God is to cry out to Him, trusting that He alone can help us. To be saved is our greatest need, but at the same time our God is attentive to everything that happens to us. He never closes his eyes or ears to us.

In 1 Samuel 20:42, the name of God is used to make an “oath” or a “covenant” between two or more persons. To swear is to affirm or deny something or agree to fulfill a common purpose. When a covenant or oath is made before God, it is very serious. It is not only among the people involved, but God is also included. For example, in a marriage ceremony, the pact of the couple is not only one to the other, it is also a pact with God to always be united.

In 2 Samuel 6:18 it is used to “bless”. In the passage David had just returned the Ark of God to Jerusalem. That meant a lot to the Israelites, it represented the presence of God in their midst. Then David made sacrifices and peace offerings in gratitude to God and blessed the people. David could not bless the people, but he could cry out to God for a blessing for the people. Many people use the phrase “I bless you in the name of God.” This means that we are asking God to bless this person. Unfortunately it has become a habit and the phrase is said without much thought.

Finally, the name of God is used during “baptism” (Matthew 28:19-20). When Jesus ascended to heaven He gave the great commission to His disciples. One of the tasks that the disciples had to fulfill was to baptize the believers in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Now let’s see how we abuse the use of the name of God. Exodus 20:7 commands us not to take His name in vain. Vano in the original language means vanity, unreal, frivolous, empty. In other words, it prohibits expressing oneself irreverently of God.

Ask: How do we use His name irreverently? Sometimes jokes are used mentioning God; or expressions in moments of anger; etc. In this way we are referring to God in vain. In Matthew 5:33-37, it refers to false oaths. Many times people want to put more value to their words, even if they are false, swearing in the name of God. That is, putting God as a witness that what they affirm is true. Matthew tells us that we must be responsible in our speaking, if it is yes or if is no.

Talk to your students and share some examples. Many use the phrase “by God!”, “On behalf of God!” However, they are telling a lie or a half truth.

Review/Apply: Ask the class to read the following Bible references and explain in which situation the Lord’s name should be used.

1. Psalm 43:1-3 : *Exalt His name*
2. Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13 : *Call on His name for salvation*
3. 1 Samuel 20:42 : *Making a pact between two or more people*
4. 2 Samuel 6:18: *Blessing people*
5. Matthew 28:19-20: *Baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

Ask the class to read the following Bible references that indicate when the name of the Lord should not be used.

1. Exodus 20:7: *Speaking irreverently of the Lord*
2. Matthew 5:33-37: *Swearing*
3. Leviticus 24:10-16 : *Blaspheming against God’s name*

Challenge: Say to your class: Would you like to make a covenant with God to be very careful in referring to Him? God knows us and wants to help us change our heart and our expressions.



It's finally Sunday!

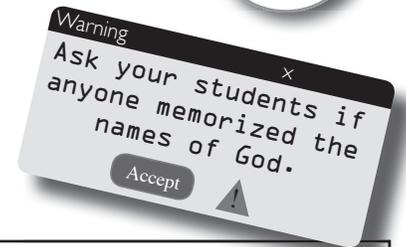
Lesson

35

Myrna Riley • Mexico

Objective: That the students will understand and analyze how important a day of rest is in his or her Christian walk.

Memory Verse: *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.* Exodus 20:8



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Sheets of paper and pencils.
- Instructions: Ask your students to write a schedule of activities that they usually do on Sunday. Ask them to specify the time of each activity and then figure out how much time of that day they spend worshipping God. Have them share the results with the group. We are responsible for administrating our time and the place we give to God in our lives.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Sheets of paper and pencils.
- Instructions: Write the following questions on the board and ask students to answer them individually. Since when have you attended church on Sundays? Why do you come to the church on Sundays? What other activities do you do on Sundays, besides coming to church? Then ask them to share their answers with the class.

As we grow in our faith, we must be more careful with the time we give to God and how we spend Sundays.

Connect

Navigate

1. The establishment of the Sabbath

The fourth commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” Exodus 20:8. Etymologically, the word “rest” means to cease, rest, or rest from any work. “Keeping it holy” is to separate, segregate from others and reserve as if it were a religious holiday. This term was also used to refer to something that was consecrated exclusively for God. In order for students to know more about this commandment, it is important that they read the biblical text, analyze and reflect on their own about the subject. Divide the class into three teams and assign each team one of the following passages: Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 31:12-18; Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Ask them to answer the following questions:

- Who said that we should keep the Sabbath? *God instituted the Sabbath.*
- What day of the week was the Sabbath? *It was the seventh day. God created everything that exists in six days and rested the seventh. For the Jews it is the Sabbath.*
- What happened to those who did not keep the Sabbath? *The person was punished with death (Exodus 31:14).*
- Why should we keep the Sabbath? *It is a covenant that God made with his people Israel, and with us.*

Allow each team to share their answers. From the times of the Old Testament, the Jews kept the seventh day (the Sabbath or Saturday), and today some denominations continue keeping the Sabbath as a Sabbath. This has brought a lot of controversy for centuries. The early Christians of the early church made a decision regarding the Sabbath. They changed it to Sunday, the first day of the week, and they called it “Lord’s day”. They dedicated the first day of the week to the Lord because Christ was resurrected on that day (Luke 24:1, John 20:1). In the following biblical quotations, there are some references regarding the meeting day of the early church: Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2. In Revelation 1:10, it is mentioned that John was worshipping God on that day. He does not mention that he was with the congregation, but it is interesting to recognize that even in his time of exile, John dedicated that day to a time of worship to God. God knows humans and our tendency to forget Him, that is why this commandment is still valid today. The importance of keeping the Sabbath day is not so much in the day, but in the interest of God that we rest a day for personal benefit and to dedicate ourselves to worship him in communion with other brothers and sisters, and also personally.

2. We must organize the time.

It is important to emphasize that in order to save that holy day, we must organize all chores and responsibilities



during the previous 6 days, “six days you will work, and you will do all your work” (Exodus 20:9). That is, there must be intentional planning in order to be free of work on Sunday. This implies that you have to prepare all week to enjoy the seventh day. Today young people study, work or do both, and Sunday is their only day off and they want to rest, have fun or do homework.

As young Christians, how should we prepare for the Sabbath? Talk with your students about it. It is important to have the disposition and decision to continue attending church even when there are many tasks involved. Several young people can testify of how they were blessed in their studies for putting God first. God honors those who honor him and give Him first place in their lives. God clearly specifies who are the ones who should not work on the Sabbath day: members of the family, servants, foreigners and pack animals (Exodus 20:10). God is interested in every human and animal that works every day to rest one day for their physical, emotional and social wellbeing, but human beings must also do it to take care of their spirituality and fellowship.

3. A time with the Lord and his people

God explained to his people why the Sabbath was special:

- Because in six days He did all his creative work, and on the seventh day He blessed it and rested to be in communion with all creation (Exodus 20:11; 31:17).
- Because He made a pact with His people. The Sabbath would be a sign that God set apart a holy, special people to worship Him. And the fulfillment of this covenant would serve to reinforce the faith of future generations (Exodus 31:13,16). In the same way today, as we teach our children to keep the Lord’s day, we are strengthening their faith and teaching them to do the same with their own children.
- Because His people were liberated from slavery in Egypt by His powerful hand. During that period of slavery, they were not free to worship God. Therefore, the Sabbath would be kept as a sign of that great liberation (Deut. 5:15).

How important it is to remember that we were freed from sin. That helps us grow and strengthen our faith. In Isaiah’s time, the people of Israel forgot to obey this commandment, and therefore the prophet gave a message to the people from God: If they, during the Sabbath, decided to seek to delight in Him, instead of worrying for their own activities; God would bless them fully (Isaiah 58:13-14). In the New Testament, Jesus set an example of continuing to obey that commandment, not because of the importance of the day, but because of the attitude one has in keeping the day (Matthew 12:1-4).

The Jews kept the Sabbath without working, but their hearts were filled with hatred and resentment against Jesus and did not fulfill the spirit of the commandment, which was to be in communion with God and to worship Him (Matthew 12:7). The early church changed the Jewish Sabbath that was celebrated on the Sabbath (Saturday). They decided to take the first day of the week, Sunday, and call it “the Lord’s Day,” so that there would be no confusion with the Jewish Christians who wanted to insert the laws of Judaism into the Christian church, and because Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week. The restrictions set for the Jewish Sabbath were not transferred to the first day of the week. The New Testament does not give specifications about what should or should not be done that day (Colossians 2:16-17). What the New Testament teaches is that the early church met to worship God, listen to the message of His Word, receive offerings, and participate in fellowship with the brothers. We must remember that at that time, some of them could not do so with ample freedom due to the persecutions against Christians. However, the faithfulness to God was in first place, and every Christian was strengthened in his faith and the church grew.

Review/Apply: Guide the class in reading the passages from Exodus 31:14-16 and Isaiah 58:13-14 and ask them to answer the following questions:

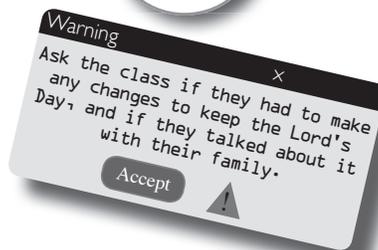
1. What happened to people who did not keep the Sabbath? *They were condemned to death.*
2. Why do you think God commanded such drastic measures for not obeying this commandment? *Because the people were hard-hearted and easily forgot to worship God and recognize Him as their only God.*
3. How did God want his people to remember the Sabbath, according to verse 16? *As a celebration of the eternal covenant between God and his people.*
4. What blessings will we get if we keep the Sabbath, according to the prophet Isaiah? *We will do God’s will and not ours, we will delight in worshipping Him, He will raise us to heaven and we will be with Him eternally.*
5. Why today do we no longer keep the Jewish day of rest, but the day of the Christian Lord? *Because the first Christians decided to celebrate the resurrection of Christ and not to create confusion with the Jewish ordinances.*

Challenge: Say to your class: How is your life affected by what you learned in class today? During the week, reorganize your time so that you can dedicate Sunday to rest and worship God. Share this with your family and encourage them to keep the “Lord’s Day.”



Objective: That the students will recognize the importance of obeying God and the importance of the relationship between parents and children.

Memory Verse: *Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.* Exodus 20:12



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil.
- Instructions: Divide the youth into three groups; ask them to write a list of their duties to their parents. Then ask each group to present their “List of duties to their parents” and together make a single list. For example:
 1. I have a duty to listen to my parents.
 2. I have a duty to give them love and affection, etc.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Pencil and paper
- Instructions: Divide the students into three groups. Ask each group to write a list of their parent’s rights. Ask each group to share their list with the rest of the class. For example:
 1. My parents have the right to know where I am and who I am with.
 2. My parents have the right to give their opinion about my personal life.

Connect

Navigate

To honor our parents is a commandment of the Lord, probably one of the best known of all, however sometimes the least understood at the time of being put into practice. God designed the family and put the parents at the head of it so that the children will honor Him through our father and mother.

1. A just commandment from God

When God designed humans, as with all His creation, He made it perfect through rules or laws that sustain everything created, “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31). If we break laws, we will receive the consequences of such an act. It is as if we jump from an airplane without a parachute, hoping to convince ourselves that the law of gravity does not exist. Perhaps the consequences of man’s rebellion are not as graphic as they are with gravity, but they can be even worse, because if there is no repentance, the consequences can be eternal (Leviticus 26:3-4). The commandments that God has given are guides for our lives. The fifth commandment tells us, “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). From the beginning, God established the importance of the family and the authority of the parents in the home. The blessings for children who love, obey and respect their parents are lifelong. God wanted the people of Israel to be an example for the neighboring nations, and pointed out the importance of the family as the basis of every society. Currently, this commandment is increasingly being changed by society. Much is said about the rights of children without reminding them of their duties. Our love for God is shown through the fulfillment of His commandments, a relationship in which we submit ourselves to His voice and His will.

2. You decide!

When God commanded us to honor our parents, He did not mean to obey only (Ephesians 6:1-2). The word honor or “timáo” in Greek also means reward, value and reverence. Honoring transcends the border of obedience and complements it with respect and love.

This commandment, as the Bible says, is a commandment that brings promise (v. 2). If we fulfill it, God promises to give us a long life on this earth. God the Father knew what He was talking about when He referred to honor. His son Jesus always honored Him in His ministry on earth. “And a voice from heaven



said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:17). God the Father was pleased by the honor He received from His son through His obedience and love.

We must honor our parents with acts of love and behavior that speaks well of them and glorifies God. Being obedient and honoring our parents and God can be difficult. We may even “savor” the idea of not obeying and that is a decision we have to make.

Let’s see what Jesus did in a moment of great difficulty and decision. “Then Jesus said to them, ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.’ ... Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”(Matt. 26:38-39).

Regardless of the situation, honor and obedience will always be synonymous with holiness, and holiness is a commandment from God. “Be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). On the other hand, if we live in holiness and obedience, the Lord will be at our side to breathe life into our lives.

Ask: In light of Ephesians 6:1-3, is obedience to parents life-long? And the honor? (The Bible does not specify that there is a limit to that commandment.)

Children must learn to honor their parents as children, and they must practice it while they live in the same house as their parents, and keep it when they leave. Many young people believe that because they no longer live with their parents or do not depend one hundred percent on them, they no longer owe them respect or consideration. Others believe that because they formed their own home, they no longer need to support their parents.

Jesus referred to this matter in Matthew 15:4-6. The Jewish traditions demanded extra offerings to those that God had indicated. Jesus said that if a son made those offerings as a pretext for not helping his parents, he was not honoring them. It is interesting that this problem also appeared in the early church. Paul sent a letter to Timothy saying, “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God” (1 Timothy 5:4). This teaching is based on the fifth commandment. Honor to parents does not end when the child becomes an adult.

Should I obey my parents in everything? Ephesians 6:1 states, “obey your parents in the Lord.” It is very difficult to declare this when parents are not led by God. The child who is a Christian will see their faith tested on many occasions but will have to put God first (Acts 4:19, 5:29). However, parents should always be loved and honored without compromising one’s faith. Talk with your students about what would be some practical examples of honoring parents?

3. Investing in the future

Often when Christians talk about what God has for them, they refer to future celestial rewards like heaven. However, reality is closer, because our actions and life decisions bring immediate and future consequences (Galatians 6:7). God wants us to sow well so that we gather only the good and the mercy that He has for us. God arranged all things according to His will. He wants us to live on this earth being light, and come out with a testimony that speaks well of God, who is the Savior of our souls. When we honor our parents, we are sowing correctly, and God added a promise to this commandment, “that it may go well with you on the land that Jehovah your God gives you” (Deuteronomy 5:16). What a beautiful guarantee of the future!

When an adult child fulfills this commandment, he or she is teaching their own children by their example to fulfill this commandment. Deuteronomy 6:7-9 indicates the responsibility of parents to repeat these commandments to their children at all times and in all places: At home, on the road, at bedtime, and when getting up. He even asks to put reminders in the house. If each one of us commits to fulfill this command, we will be forming a new society based on love, respect and honor. The almighty Lord God gives us a promise in His Word that if we honor our parents, our life on this earth will be long and that it will also be a good life. That is called having an assurance of a good future. There is no better investment we can make then honoring our parents to impact our present and future life in this world.

Review/Apply: Divide the class into groups and have them put the following terms in order of most to least important in a parent/child relationship.

- Honor-Values-Obedience-Respect-Dignity-Love.
- Ask the students to explain their reasoning process.

Challenge: Say to your class: Plan a special time with your family. Prepare an afternoon of games or hobbies that everyone enjoys at home, make invitations for everyone indicating the date, time and place where the great event will take place. If possible, prepare something to drink and eat to share, such as cookies or popcorn.



You shall Not Kill

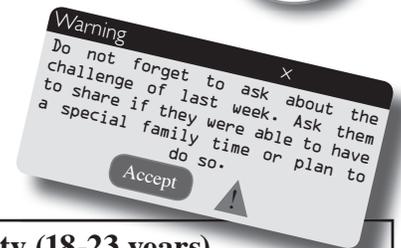
Lesson

37

Eudo Prado • Venezuela

Objective: That the students will understand they must respect human life.

Memory Verse: *You shall not kill.* Exodus 20:13



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Magazine clippings and newspapers about homicides; colored markers, white cards, crayons, glue and scissors.
- Instructions: Divide the class into groups of three or four people. Ask them to make a warning to young people about the danger of violence and homicide. Each letter must have a phrase in large letters, and a brief biblical verse that reflects on the problem of homicide. At the end, comment on the contents of the warnings. Discuss the challenge that this means for the ministry of evangelization among young people.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Newspaper clippings, or magazines; police chronicles with reports of homicides.
- Instructions: Divide the class into small groups and deliver a report to each group. Each group must respond:
 1. What do you think was the motivation for this homicide?
 2. Why do you think that the world gives so little value to human life?
 3. What can the youth ministry of our church do to help our community or city in preventing homicide?At the end, discuss the responses of the groups, and discuss the answers to question number 3.

Connect

Navigate

The Bible teaches that people are the most excellent work of God's creation. He created us in a personal and direct way "in His own image". God gave us specific commandments about respecting human life. His will is for people to consider the life of our fellow humans as sacred. However, one of the main manifestations of the prevailing violence in the world today is homicide. It is so common that there are people who dedicate themselves to ending the lives of other human beings. Killing others for money has become a way to make a living. How contrary this is to the purpose of God, our Father and Creator. God says in his Word that His will is that all people live as brothers. The Bible teaches that human life is a gift from God. Therefore, anyone who attempts to take the life of another human being is opposed to the will of his Creator.

1. Human life belongs to God.

There is a "theory of evolution" that teaches that human beings are the result of the evolution of another "species". This theory is not really scientific but simply a "hypothesis". It has been said that accepting evolution requires more faith than accepting what the Bible says about the origin of life. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read that God created man "in His image." Human life did not come into existence by a casual process. It is the result of divine design. This design is full of wisdom and purpose. In addition, the human being is the only creature that was made with the similarity to the Creator, which is why it has so much value. In Genesis 1, when the original creation is described, a repeated phrase appears: "God said ... and it was so." When it refers to the creation of man, the same words are not used (Genesis 2:7). We can say that this indicates that the human being is a personal and special creation of God. In addition, God assigned the human being a special place as administrator of His creation (Genesis 1:26, Psalm 8:6). As the Creator and Supreme Ruler of the universe, God established laws that govern all things. One of the ten commandments of God's law, the sixth, forbids us to take the life of another person. It is found in Exodus 20:13 and contains only two simple words but with a great meaning: "You shall not kill." This commandment indicates the excellence of human life and the will of the Creator to preserve it.



2. Regulations about homicide

Homicide is very common today. Movies, television series and violent video games are the most popular. There is an excessive interest in this subject.

Violence is not only something present in our society. Throughout history, in different times and cultures, mankind showed signs of cruelty against other human beings. For example, various ancient civilizations, such as the Mesoamericans (Aztecs, Mayas, etc.), sacrificed living human beings to their gods, and did so with great cruelty. Historians and sociologists tell us of the immense pleasure felt by the spectators and those who participated as executioners. This is so because of mankind's natural tendency toward sin and his ignorance of God's Word.

The second biblical story after Adam's disobedience is the story of a murder in the first family (Genesis 4:8). Since then, homicide has been a continuous fact in the world. The flood in the days of Noah came as a punishment for the spread of this type of sin (Genesis 6:11).

In order to prevent the natural sinful tendency that leads a person to commit violent and unjust acts against his neighbor, God established express orders against homicide. Exodus 21:12-25 teaches that killing a person with premeditation and treachery merited the death penalty. Even the act of hurting one's own father or mother was punishable by death. However, the one who caused the death of another person without intention could take refuge in one of the "cities of refuge" established by God in Israel until he was formally judged with the testimony of several witnesses (Numbers 35:9-34). This indicates God's care for the impartial application of justice. It is clear that in his great love for people, God's interest is to protect the lives of all without exception.

3. Jesus and murder

Very often, a discussion or controversy between two or more people can trigger violent acts. When someone's pride is trampled by another, or the person is exposed to public ridicule, the natural tendency is to seek revenge. It happens very often that discussions about "small issues" lead to facts of blood. Jesus calls believers to be peacemakers. Hence, the great importance of the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22 about homicide. Although the sixth commandment prohibits homicide, and there are a series of regulations in the law for its punishment, the commandment of Jesus sought to correct the motivation itself. Homicide as a sinful act comes from the very heart of the individual. A feeling of anger against our neighbor could lead us to make an attempt against his life; therefore, it is as condemnable as the very fact of homicide.

Feelings of anger are usually expressed in offensive words. Jesus mentioned in Matthew 5:22 the most usual words in his day to offend others. The word that translates "Fool" is "Raca", which means something like imbecile, stupid, or empty head. The other term that is translated "Fool" is "More", whose meaning is foolish, or rogue. It was used to refer to lowly or low-class people. In moments of anger, the person tends to look for the most hurtful words to attack the other person. For Jesus, the insulting and contemptuous language, the one with sinful anger, is as condemnable as homicide itself. 1 John 3:11-15 also teaches that to hold in the heart resentment or roots of bitterness against others in the faith makes us "murderers" before God (1 John 3:15). This type of attitude can hinder our salvation (v. 15b).

Fortunately, both Jesus and the apostle John tell us that the solution to the problem of violence and homicide in the world is the life filled with the love of God. Jesus speaks in Matthew 5:23-24 of the forgiving attitude that leads us to reach reconciliation with our adversaries. The apostle John teaches us that Christian love leads us to assume the attitude of Christ (1 John 3:16) who only wants the good of others.

Review/Apply: Ask that in the following list of attitudes related to the topic of study, the students should indicate briefly and in their own words the meanings (the answers do not have to be identical to the ones suggested, but they must contain the corresponding idea).

1. Desire for revenge: *Willingness to return evil for evil, to do the harm they did to us.*
2. Pacifying attitude: *Attitude that promotes forgiveness and reconciliation as the means to fix differences.*
3. Cruelty: *Bad disposition, violent and merciless attitude against others.*
4. Respect for others: *Consideration of the value and human dignity of other people.*
5. Root of bitterness: *Deep inner resentment against another.*
6. Forgiving disposition: *Attitude that overlooks the offenses and the damage received.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Let's plan to paint a mural on a wall in the neighborhood or the community where the church is located, reflecting on youth violence and homicide, and the answer to reducing it.



Watch Your Eyes!

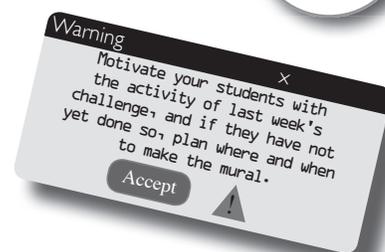
Lesson

38

Helen Andújar • Puerto Rico

Objective: That the students understand that God is displeased by adultery. Adultery destroys all people involved.

Memory Verse: *You shall not commit adultery.* Exodus 20:14



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Cardboard, markers and scissors.
- Instructions: Write the following sentence on a poster: "He who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed sin". Then cut the cardboard into small pieces to form a puzzle. Divide into groups and allow time for them to put it together and comment on the phrase.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: A sheet of paper, pencils or pens.
- Instructions: Ask the students to write on their paper any ideas they have about the word "adultery." Have them share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Connect

Navigate

The seventh commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." However throughout the history of mankind, this commandment has been and continues to be broken. Marriage, the most sacred institution created by God, is being violated and destroyed. Adultery affects both the home and society. It also causes heartbreaking situations such as divorce, abandonment of children, domestic violence, suicides and homicides.

1. What is adultery?

Adultery is defined as consensual sexual intercourse between a married person and another person other than his/her spouse. Do not confuse adultery with fornication, which is also a sin. Fornication refers to an illicit sexual relationship whether married or not. In adultery, marriage is implied. This sin contaminates the body and relationship with God. The Bible is very clear in pointing out that those who practice it will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (Galatians 5:19-21). In the Ten Commandments, the prohibition of adultery is very clear, "you shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). The violation of this commandment was punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22:22-29). If adultery was committed in mutual agreement, the consequence was death for both people. However, if the woman was raped by a married man, only the man was punished by death. Also, Proverbs 6:29-35 mentions that adultery can be so destructive that there is no restitution for such an act. This passage states that an adulterer is a person who has no sense, and no compensation is sufficient to obtain the forgiveness of the person who was offended (the other spouse). This sin marks the lives of all involved.

Today, many men and women in this humiliating situation prefer to kill their spouse and then take their own lives. Others opt for divorce or they abandon their families. Unfortunately, this leaves children feeling helpless and emotionally affected to such a degree that they sometimes become rebellious delinquents in society. 1 Corinthians 15-20 points out that a believer's body belongs to God, and that it is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must honor God with our body. It also emphasizes the intimacy of the sexual relationship. When God created the first couple, He indicated that they would be one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Paul indicates that the same thing happens when committing adultery or fornication. The adulterer has bonded so intimately with another person that it will not be easy to break that relationship. He has sinned against his own body.

2. Adultery is born in the heart.

In His teachings to the disciples and others, Jesus referred to adultery. In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus not only condemned the act of adultery, but also the intention of the heart (v. 28). A preacher commented, "If you are



married and you look at a woman, the first time you are using the sense of sight. If you look at her a second time, you are allowing yourself to be tempted. If you look at her for the third time, you have opened your heart to sin. Beyond a third time, it is definitely sin.” Clearly Jesus expresses it in His Word that if a man looks at a woman with lust, he has already sinned. The same applies to the woman who looks at a man with lust.

In Matthew 15:18-20, Jesus extended this idea by emphasizing that what comes out of the mouth of a person comes first from the heart. It is not what enters the mouth that contaminates, but what comes out of the mouth. He explained that evil thoughts, homicide, adultery, fornication, theft, false testimony and blasphemy come from the heart. The sin of adultery begins in the heart long before committing the act itself.

For the scribes and Pharisees, religion was the observance of rules and regulations in strict legalism. Their worship was ceremonial and manifested by keeping the law. But Jesus taught that worship comes from the heart, not from legalism. Jesus stated that the state of the heart was more important than the observance of rituals (Matthew 5:19-30). The television, internet, magazines, and even songs promote living a life with no biblical values. Adultery and fornication, are increasingly being accepted in our society.

Ask: What feeds our heart? How can we take care of our heart? Talk with your students.

Currently many marriages end in divorce because one of the spouses wants to be with another person. The love affairs of politicians, millionaires, film artists and famous singers are well publicized. In addition, movies and television novels promote adultery and fornication. A believer must be governed by the Scriptures, which are the guide to moral conduct that pleases God. Adultery is sin, and like all sin, begins with temptation. Jesus himself offered to help a person who is tempted. You have to seek his help in time (Hebrews 4:16).

3. God's plan for marriage

God expects every believer to know His Word and to be faithful to his own wife or husband. Both must fulfill their conjugal duty (1 Corinthians 7:2-3). Through marriage, the sexual needs of men and women are met. This is guaranteed by God, since the sexual relationship of marriage is clean and pure. They should not be deprived of it, because it would make them vulnerable to temptation. Sexual relationships outside marriage immediately put the person under God's judgment. God created man and woman to share life with a reciprocated love. Marriage is the most beautiful gift that God gave to human beings. God honors marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

Jesus also taught that even though a man or woman has sinned, He offers forgiveness. In John 8:1-6, we see how the Jews tried to set a “trap” for Jesus. They found a woman in the act of adultery and sought Jesus' opinion. He knew that the law demanded that the woman be stoned to death, but she sought restoration (John 8:7-11). Jesus forgave her and told her to “go and sin no more”.

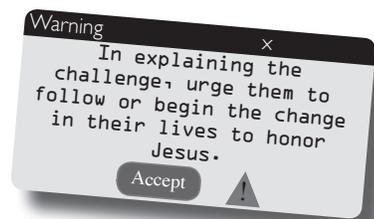
The forgiveness that Jesus offers is accompanied by a new life. He wants to help us start over, and although there are inevitable consequences, we can trust that with His help, they will be bearable.

According to Galatians 5:19, one of the works of the flesh is adultery, but those who belong to Christ must crucify these passions and desires (Galatians 5:24). In the same way that Christ died on the cross, everything that can become an obstacle to the grace of God must also be put to death. Adultery is one of the most common sins and is also accepted by society. We Christians must be very clear about the biblical teaching regarding adultery and seek help from God to live according to His principles.

Review/Apply: Allow time for your students to give a definition for each word, according to the lesson studied.

1. Adultery: *Adultery is the sexual union between two people who are not married to each other*
2. Marriage: *It was instituted by God. It must stay pure.*
3. Adulterer: *Person who commits adultery.*
4. Commandment: *A law of God.*
5. Temptation: *Inclination to disobey God in something we know to be wrong.*

Challenge: Say to your class: During the week you can search the Bible for verses that help to strengthen yourself spiritually. The Bible gives us examples of young people who were tempted and did not sin. Write a list of things you usually do that do not help you maintain your sexual purity. Ask God for help to leave them and then break them.



Do Not Steal!

Lesson 39

Oscar Pérez • Dominican Republic

Objective: That the students feel convicted about the importance of not stealing, and that they practice integrity in all circumstances.

Memory Verse: *You shall not steal.* Exodus 20:15



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blank sheets and pencils.
- Instructions: Divide the class into pairs or groups and allow time for them to write their own version of Exodus 20:15. It has to be clear and must include an example of subtle ways in which we can steal. Once they complete the task, stick the sheet on the board and discuss the examples.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Instructions: Form two or three groups and ask them to quickly dramatize the commandment in Exodus 20:15. They do not have to be traditional forms of theft, but rather subtle forms in which even those who attend the church can participate. There are many ways to break that commandment.

Connect

Navigate

The expression “Ama sua” of the Quechua language is part of the moral code of the Incas. Honesty is a virtue that many human beings cultivate, based on family upbringing, education and religion. When internalized, it forms deep convictions. However, many human beings do not consider honesty as a good practice of social coexistence and they are dedicated to distort it by practicing theft. Theft has been a practice that degenerated the behavior of mankind. For this reason, God considered it important to include in the eighth commandment: “You shall not steal.” Theft in our modern society is punishable by law. Let’s see below what is taught on this subject from the most authoritative moral code for the well-being of mankind, that is, the sacred Scriptures:

1. Do not steal, it is a commandment

In Exodus, the eighth commandment clearly says, “You shall not steal.” In Hebrew, this word means to steal literally or figuratively. We can say that it means to take something that does not belong to us without the consent or knowledge of its owner. This commandment, also called the Decalogue, was given by God at Mount Sinai, while the Jewish people made a pilgrimage to the promised land. Together with nine others, they constitute what is known as the Ten Commandments. God knows human nature was affected by original sin. People often want to get what they want in a fast and effortless way. God wanted the Jewish people to be an example to the neighboring nations.

Today, God wants the church to be that example to the world. With this commandment, God wishes to protect people’s rights, as well as maintain good social relationships in order to coexist and exercise mutual respect. The Ten Commandments are a moral and ethical code that benefits all humankind and should not be broken.

2. Types and “justifications” of theft.

There are various modalities, practices and “justifications” to violate the divine commandment and disturb the personal and collective peace. It is fair to clarify that theft, in all its forms, violates the divine law and therefore is sin. There is no justification that validates the action.

Breaking of civil laws. Nations have laws that typify theft and impose punishments. Despite the legislation, there is a lot of impunity in favor of the offenders, and that promotes more theft. The political authorities steal systematically and rob the military, legal authorities, businessmen, merchants and others. The forms vary according to the case: Evasion of taxes, undue charges (bribes, fraudulent transactions, etc.), copyright infringement, cyber theft, plagiarism, etc. Talk with your students about these types of stealing, especially plagiarism. With the ease of finding information on the internet, some students only copy the writings



without mentioning the author, and then present them as their own ideas or their own analysis. This is known as plagiarism and fits in the robbery category.

Breaking the divine law about tithes. To steal, as described in the previous point, is to violate the law of God. At this point, we refer to a very common infraction among leaders of the Christian faith, the wrong use of tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8). There is no justification for evading the mandate to take the tithes to the storehouse, for the support of the House of God and of those who serve and minister in it.

Breaking the law of conscience. Our intuition and ability to differentiate between good and bad enables us to always choose good and act with justice in circumstantial moments. However, we can violate our conscience by doing wrong. For example, when in the supermarket if they by mistake give us more change than we should receive, if we keep it consciously, it is wrong. It can also happen at the bank or any trade or when they lend us something and we do not give it back. This behavior can be with all kinds of objects. We must obey the promptings of our conscience and always seek to do good to our neighbor. People have tried to “justify” the theft, citing false reasoning as “seizing the opportunity”, “due to poverty and the need to satisfy immediate needs”, it can be something simple and common and it is argued that “everyone does it”, etc. However, God says that theft is sin.

3. Recommendations

Behavioral change - “Anyone who has been stealing, must steal no longer” (Ephesians 4:28a). Christians are new creatures and the “behaviors” and past actions were left behind. Now we are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17); we must persevere in our faith and holiness of life (1 Peter 1:13-16).

Responsible work - “doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). Useful work is one of the antidotes against stealing. God created us to work. Work is not divine punishment. In the creation account, before the fall, God assigned work to man (Genesis 1:26-28). When I was a child, I sang a little song that said, “Oh be careful little hands what you do ... for the Father up above is watching down in love.” It is still a valid warning. When I was a little boy, my father advised me, “Son, let work be the recreation of your life.” We are still enjoying ourselves!

Generosity to the needy - “that they may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28c). Working can help eliminate theft, and it must produce a desire to be generous to the needy. Helping the needy is a biblical mandate. Work blesses the recipient and the giver. The Christian who lives in holiness is generous and authentic (Acts 20:35).

A faithful steward - ““Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it”” (Malachi 3:10). By being faithful with our offerings and tithes, we are obeying a command from God, and He will fulfill His promise.

Restitution - “But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, restitution must be made to the owner” (Exodus 22:12). The term “restitution” means to compensate for damage, return, pay for damage, repair. This action is very important in order to cancel the fault. After the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus decided to return four times more to the ones from whom he had stolen. This action was a restitution (Luke 19:1-10).

Theft, in all its forms is a sin against God and neighbor. The offender must repent of his sin, he must change his behavior, and he must seek restitution for the grievance. Only in this way will he achieve the forgiveness and inner peace that only Christ grants.

Review/Apply: Have your students answer the following questions according to what they studied in class.

1. Why are the Ten Commandments also called the Decalogue? *Because there are ten.*
2. What is the eighth commandment? *You will not steal.*
3. What are the types of theft that the lesson presents us with? *Breaking of the civil law, the divine law, and the law of conscience.*
4. What are the recommendations suggested by the author of the lesson? *Behavioral change, responsible work, generosity to the needy, good stewardship and restitution.*
5. What did the lesson leave with you today?

Challenge: Say to your class: Prepare a phrase that represents something you learned in this lesson and send it to all your contacts. Try to realize how important it is to fulfill this commandment of God.



Words To The Wind!

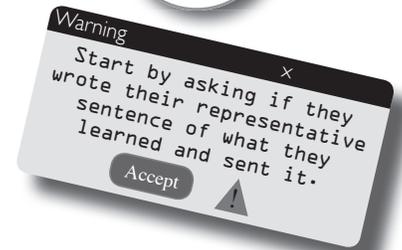
Lesson

40

Tabita González • USA

Objective: That the students understand the meaning of bearing false testimony, and that they make a commitment to not speak words that jeopardize their friends.

Memory Verse: *You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.* Exodus 20:16



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and markers.
- Instructions: Have the class sit in a circle. Ask each participant (or just some if the class is very large) to say three sentences about himself/herself, two true and one false. The other classmates will say which sentence is false. After each student gives an opinion, the student will reveal the false statement. This will be done with each one until all (or those chosen for this) have said their statements. Write the names of all the participants on the board and give a point to the person who discovers the false statement. At the end, the one with the highest score will be the one who knows his classmates the best. Have the students think about the occasions when they said something about someone that was not true. Bearing false testimony can also be telling a half truth.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Three envelopes with copies that have the next 10 phrases placed in different order: She was with her friends. / She left the house. / She met her boyfriend. / She ate popcorn. / She returned to the house. / She washed the dishes / She finished her work. / She brushed her teeth. / She painted her nails. / She read the Bible. And with one of the following cards: Ana's Pastor, Ana's parents, Ana's teacher.
- Instructions: Divide the class into three groups and ask each one to order the facts of Ana's story to tell the person to whom it is requested. Each group will tell the version of the story and to whom it is addressed and defend the story. Read the story in the order that is in the book. Ask: Have you ever said something that was not true just to please the listeners or to get rid of a problem? No matter the situation, the Word of God encourages us not to give false testimony of our neighbor.

Connect

Navigate

False accusations and testimonies are not new. Beginning in the book of Genesis, there are stories of biblical characters who lost their jobs, were separated from their friends, and even faced death due to false accusations. Among them we can name Joseph (Genesis 37 and 39), the apostle Paul (Acts 21:27-36) and even Jesus himself (Luke 23). They were falsely accused before the authorities and received an undeserved punishment. We can also remember some history, personal or of another person, that was affected by a false testimony. God does not like lying nor bearing false testimony. The Bible, which is the Word of God, does not hide the stories of false testimonies and their consequences, and gives us clear directions on this subject.

1. What is a false testimony?

The ninth commandment of God to the people of Israel (and us), together with the last six commandments, relate to the responsibility we have concerning ourselves and the people around us. False testimony is saying something that is not the truth about something or someone. This includes saying falsehoods, half-truths or even deceiving others. It also means saying unfair things that damage the reputation of others and/or falsely testifying by making them look guilty of things they were not involved in, whether in a court or outside it. It includes talking badly behind someone else's back. It also refers to exaggerating a story to exalt oneself by disparaging another person. We must not speak ill or tell lies about others.

In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to answer the question, Who is my neighbor? The relationship that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews teaches us that our neighbor is not only one of our relatives or friends. Jews and Samaritans had many differences between them due to political and social reasons. Jesus taught that our neighbor is the one with whom we come into contact (whether we like them or not), and have the opportunity to bless. We can find them in the street, school or work. Talk with your students about whom they consider their neighbors and how they refer to them.



2. Consequences of false testimony

The book of Proverbs 25:18 states that, “Like a club or a sword or a harp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor”. You cannot turn back time and delete or change words said. It’s like plucking a chicken. The feathers cannot be put back on again. We have no control over how people will use what we say about others. Words spoken to the wind do not cling to networks! False testimony hurts the other person as if they were wounded with a knife. It denigrates their personhood and makes others doubt their character.

Remember the story of Joseph in the house of Potiphar (Genesis 39:1-20). Potiphar’s wife, angry for not getting Joseph’s attention, told her husband, “That Hebrew slave you brought us wanted to rape me. But as soon as I started shouting for help, he left his clothes next to me and ran out of the house” (Genesis 39:17-18, TLA). Because of this lie, Joseph spent many years of his life in prison, until in due time, God took him out of there and put him as governor of Egypt in order to save his family and many people.

The consequences of a lie or bad testimony can be very harmful, but it is not limited to the person who was talked about. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus declared, “Anyone who insults his brother will be subject to judgment. But whoever curses him will be subject to the judgment of hell” (Matthew 5:22, NIV). To speak badly about someone hurts the person, hurts our relationships, and prevents us from maintaining a good relationship with God. That is why in Proverbs 6:16-19 we read, “There are six things that the Lord hates, and seven that are detestable: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness that pours out lies, and a person who stirs up conflict in the community” (NIV). These six things are in direct relationship with our neighbor and highlight the damage that words can do to someone.

3. How to avoid false testimony?

The Word of God shows us at least three ways in which we can avoid false testimony:

Telling the truth: The best medicine against false testimony is a good dose of the truth (Ephesians 4:25). A counselor, helping a student who had problems with lying, advised him to do something simple but very powerful and easy to follow: “If you realize that you are saying something that is not true, do not even finish saying it. Just say, ‘It’s not true, sorry, what happened was actually ...’” Replacing the habit of telling lies with the truth helped the student correct her bad habits and commit herself to the truth.

Listen more and talk less. The one who talks a lot is more susceptible to speaking what is not true or exaggerating the facts. When we strive to listen, we become aware of things we did not know before, and maybe that we even had the wrong idea (James 1:19).

Blessing: James 3:9-10 teaches us that if we have the practice of blessing others through what we speak, we will hardly speak badly about people and avoid hurting them. May the words of our mouth seek to please God and others (Psalm 19:14).

If we keep in our hearts that God wants us to love others as ourselves, we will not run the risk of breaking this commandment that is so important to us and to others. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus invites us to treat others at all times as we would like them to treat us. Surely we would like them to tell us the truth and give us the opportunity to explain and be heard before reaching conclusions. We have the opportunity to do just that, and also to be a blessing to our neighbor through what we say.

Review/Apply: Guide your students to reflect on the following questions:

1. Why do you think Proverbs 25:18 says that “He who speaks ill of his friend hurts him more than a sword” (TLA)? *Because false testimony or speaking ill of someone hurts and kills their reputation. It leaves them with a bad image before others.*
2. In what way does fulfilling what Matthew tells us in 7:12 save us from falling into false testimony? *Because false testimony is something we do not want for ourselves.*
3. What do you think is easier, speaking or listening? How does listening help us in our interpersonal relationships? *Listening helps us to avoid misunderstandings and to know the facts as they are, and in that way, to not speak things that are not true.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Make a list of the ways you would like people to talk about you. Write a personal contract making a commitment to treat everyone the way you would like them to treat you. Ask two friends to sign the commitment as witnesses.



Objective: That the students recognize the extent of damage that greed can cause in every person and those around them.

Memory Verse: *You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.* Exodus 20:17



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Give a blank sheet to each of the students.
- Instructions: Ask each student to write a list of all the things they want and why they want them. After about five minutes, ask everyone to share what they wrote.
Many times the reason why we want something is not valid. We must analyze our hearts and identify the reason for our desires.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Clippings/printouts/advertisements of the latest news on the newest electronic devices (portable computers, cell phones, among others).
- Instructions: Ask your students to write five reasons why they think they need one or more of those devices, and three actions they would take to get it. Then have them share with their classmates.
Many times the reason we want something is not valid. We must analyze our hearts and identify the reason for our longings.

Connect

Navigate

1. Defining greed

What is greed? Greed is the "excessive desire for riches." Biblically, greed is "the carnal passion for wanting to satisfy oneself materially." As a feeling, greed does not glorify God, but shows selfishness and arrogance. Let's review what some writers of the Bible say about the subject:

- Paul says that greed is the carnal desire that is against the Spirit (Galatians 5:17).
- The prophet Isaiah says that greed is the iniquity that dwells in the rebellious heart (Isaiah 57:17).
- Moses tells us that greed is an obstacle to loving God (Deuteronomy 7:25).
- Solomon says that greed is the ambition to find riches no matter if someone has to be killed (Proverbs 1:11-19)
- Peter says that greed is a bad habit of the heart (2 Peter 2:14).
- Jesus Christ says that greed is the desire to possess all things (Mark 4:19); it is also adulterating the heart (Matthew 5:28).

These are some of the contributions we have in the Bible about greed. To what extent does greed hurt our being? What is the result of a greedy heart?

2. The disease of greed

Our world is full of greedy aspirations. For example, many countries are being subjected to hunger and poverty because their governments are exploiting the people and are power hungry. In the workplace, there are those who give in to corruption. In some families, there is the problem of greed when it comes to an inheritance. There are cases of families whose children do not talk to each other because their greed filled them with resentment over material possessions. Also, greed is the root of certain kinds of entertainment such as gambling, casinos, and the lotteries. On one occasion I talked with a person who regularly went to a casino. He told me that he only won the first time he went, but afterwards he never won anything. He invested a lot of money in the hope of winning something, but he could not stop betting. Gambling is also an irresistible attraction. Gambling can quickly become an addiction. Greed can end up bringing this type of addiction into our lives.



3. Consequences of coveting

Although some people do not realize its effects, greed causes great damage. Let's see what consequences the greedy heart brought in the stories of two young men of the Old Testament.

a. The story of Gehazi (2 Kings 5)

Naaman, the Syrian general who was healed of leprosy by the ministry of Elisha, wanted to thank the prophet by giving him great material wealth (2 Kings 5:5 and 15), but Elisha was totally opposed to receiving such presents. Gehazi, servant of Elisha and of the utmost confidence of the prophet, was moved by his greed and lied and used his influence to achieve dishonest gain. On the way back, Gehazi thought of Elisha's supposed error in not receiving those present (2 Kings 5:20). His heart began to be invaded by greed. And in this effort he did the following:

- "He misused the name of God" (v. 20b). He said, "As Jehovah lives" ... according to him, his plan had God's approval. How many can confuse their views with God's point of view? If we do not seek God's direction wholeheartedly, we can follow the greed in our hearts (Proverbs 3:7). Gehazi had the master Elisha at his side and did not seek his advice.
- "He lied out of greed" (v. 22,25). Gehazi had the nerve to respond to Naaman who was sent by the prophet. Greed can lead to lies or deception.

We try to justify our need. The media tries to make us believe that everything is indispensable and that we need it. Many have gone into debt purchasing products that they did not really need. One person told me that every time she went through the perfume shop, she saw a perfume in the store she wanted to buy, even though it cost 80% of her monthly salary. Although she had other perfumes in her house, she wanted the new one. Greed deceives us because we are moved by the desires of the flesh.

Gehazi did not care about his reputation because he was clouded by his greed. The story of Gehazi had a very sad ending, and is an example of the consequences of being greedy (v. 27). Elisha the prophet told him the punishment he would suffer. He and his family would contract leprosy. Leprosy represents the curse that we carry when we are led by greed. Gehazi did not only get leprosy, but his entire generation suffered from leprosy as well.

Beware of greed; its results are disastrous. It can be pleasant for a moment when you get what you want, but then there will be crying and sadness accompanied by terrible consequences.

b. The story of David

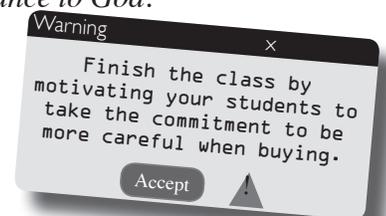
King David also fell into greed and was affected by its dire consequences. It was one of those days when kings went to war, but David stayed in his royal house. Walking on his roof he saw Bathsheba in the distance taking a bath. He looked for information about her and had her brought to the palace. Due to his greed, he committed adultery with the wife of another man (2 Samuel 11:1-4). This resulted in a pregnancy. To cover his sin, David prepared a trap in which the woman's husband was killed. He probably thought that because he was king, no one would confront him. The prophet Nathan, led by God, came before David and through a parable made him see that his greedy attitude was unjust and not pleasing in the eyes of God (2 Samuel 12:9-12). One of the consequences of David's greed was the death of the son that Bathsheba was expecting.

Both Gehazi and David broke the tenth commandment of the Lord, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). God's punishment was real for both. Greed is a disease that has serious consequences for our physical life, and much more for our spiritual life. Let's ask for wisdom and discernment to know how to act in different situations. God can help us overcome all sin and have a free life in Him.

Review/Apply: Guide your students to look up the following biblical passages and identify the character that coveted and what he coveted.

1. 2 Samuel 15:1-6 - *Absalom, coveted the reign of his father David.*
2. Joshua 7:20-21- *Achan, he coveted the riches of enemy.*
3. Acts 5:1-11- *Ananias and Saphira, covet the offering they had promised in advance to God.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Have you noticed lately if you have been invaded by this feeling of greed? If so, today I invite you to acknowledge it before the Lord as David did (2 Samuel 12:13). Ask God to forgive you and give you the wisdom to know how to direct your desires and not fall into greed. During this week, before you buy anything, think about it. Do you really need it? Look at your priorities and make a list.



Only the Truth

Lesson

42

Liliana Muñoz • Columbia

Objective: That the students understand that lying goes against God's will and brings about hard consequences.

Memory Verse: *Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.* Psalms 119:29



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: cloth, tablecloths or newspaper.
- Instructions: Ask the class to read the passage in Acts 5:1-10 and dramatize it. They will have to use the cloth or newspapers to create their costumes. Ask how they can apply the teaching of the passage to their lives.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Instructions: Ask the students to prepare a modern day skit based on Hebrews 5:1-10. The skit can portray a situation from home, school, work or church. Give a few minutes for each group to prepare. Have each group present the skit and discuss how it can be applied to everyday living.

Connect

Navigate

Sometimes people are tempted to lie. Lying is a common sin. Some people are slaves to lying and never repent because they consider it common and necessary. These people lie deliberately and also without thinking too much about it. They use lies in their daily lives because they believe that it will bring them more happiness. They are at peace with lying, and even define it as something acceptable and necessary under certain circumstances. On the other hand, there are people who understand that lying is bad, but sometimes they do lie. In either case it is wrong.

1. Sharing

The first Christians gave the apostles the amount of the sale of their properties to be distributed according to the needs of the people. In Acts 4:34-35, it says "there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need." Acts 5:1-11 tells us that Ananias and Saphira saw the situation as an opportunity to excel. This couple decided to sell a property and bring the money from the sale to the apostles (vv. 1-2) as many other Christians did. When Ananias gave the money from the sale, he possibly expected to receive applause, but the opposite happened because he was not completely sincere.

2. Fight between good and evil

When Ananias and his wife Saphira sold their property, they agreed to give only a part of the total sale to the apostles, which was a valid proposal. The situation turned sinful because they told the apostles that they sold the property at a price that was not the real one (they subtracted a part v. 2). Both had agreed to say this beforehand. They could have taken their part and brought the rest to the apostles but decided to lie and say that what they brought was the total price at which they had sold the property. Many times, a lie hides something that is very deep in the heart, or perhaps a sin already committed. James 1:12-15 tells us that sin comes after a temptation is born in the person's heart, and then the person decides to give into the temptation. Ananias and Saphira made a plan to lie before lying to the apostles.

3. What is a lie?

Peter was a person guided by the Holy Spirit. This is why he quickly recognized Ananias' lie. He was not impressed by a false attitude, and clarified to Ananias that the one whom he had truly offended with his lie was God (v. 4). When Saphira entered the scene three hours later (Acts 5:8), Peter gave her the opportunity to tell the



truth but she chose to lie.

A lie gives the appearance of temporary help, and over time, the person gets used to lying. The consequences will be evident sooner than the person imagines. A lie is a false truth; this can be total or partial. It is something that is said or affirmed as true but is not. The lie is not only spoken; sometimes could be called hypocrisy. The person who lies to achieve a goal must remain firm in their false argument. After the first lie, it will be difficult to stop lying because new questions or situations that could uncover the truth will arise so the person will continue to lie more to sustain their argument and so becomes an accomplice of evil.

Jesus showed the way of truth: The cross. Peter learned that to excel, to be promoted, to find favor in the eyes of others, or to get out of a problem quickly, lying was not the solution (Mark 8:31-33). Peter also learned that temptation comes from Satan (Acts 5:3).

Share the following example: “A person approaches others with lies to get information that can help a friend.” Ask: Do you think this is correct? Is it worth lying to help another? Although the intentions of this person to lie seems good, it is not. She is deceiving others and disobeying a command from God. It’s like trying to mix water with oil. These two elements cannot be mixed totally. In the same way, you cannot do good by using evil.

No one imagined God’s answer to Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:5,10). The passage tells us that those nearby were fearful. God is love, He is holy and does not tolerate sin even though He loves the sinner. God taught everyone the consequences of lying in a drastic way. Romans 3:23 says that the payment or consequence for sin is death. Satan was an angel who wanted to be equal to God. He was filled with pride and lies. Every lie comes from Satan (John 8:44). This is something that should be remembered when the temptation to lie arises.

4. The impact of being truthful

David, one of the most important kings of Israel, wrote Psalm 119. In verse 29 he says, “Keep me from deceitful ways.” David also fell into false sin (1 Samuel 21:1-10; 2 Samuel 11, David and Bathsheba).

David knew how strong temptation could be, and how vulnerable he was to lying. This is why he recognized that he needed help from God. John 14:6 says that Jesus is the way and the truth, and life, and indicates that “the way of lying or sin” is a lifestyle contrary to the one Jesus taught. To always speak the truth is a sign of faith in Christ. By practicing a life without lies, you affirm the testimony of wanting to be like Christ. In Acts 5 we find five very valuable points:

1. Those who are truthful recognize a lie (v. 3).
2. Those who are truthful have the Spirit of truth (v. 3, John 14:17).
3. God reveals the intentions of others through His Holy Spirit (v. 3-4; 16:16-18).
4. Those who are truthful fear the Lord and respect the work of the Holy Spirit and recognize God is a consuming fire (vv 5, 10, Hebrews 12:29).
5. People often lie to cover up sin in their lives (Acts 5:3,8).

God knows every weakness and circumstances, and does not like problems to be solved by lying. God wants to help every believer to be convinced that telling the truth is the best solution to any circumstance. To tell the truth is to say things as they are without hiding anything and without adding personal opinions. By speaking the truth, one demonstrates trust in God. The apostle Paul also taught how important it is to speak the truth, especially in the body of Christ, which is the church, Ephesians 4:25 says, “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”

Encourage the class to examine their attitudes and trust in God’s grace. Guide the conversation with these questions:

- Do I hate even the slightest deception in my speech and behavior?
- Is telling the truth a highly desirable virtue for me?
- Do I long to be like Jesus Christ, who never lied, not even under the greatest threats against his body and soul?

Review/Apply: Allow time for the students to think and write about people who lie often and why they do so. Allow time for them to write a list of the strongest temptations to lie that they encounter.

Challenge: Say to your class: Memorize Psalm 119:29 and reflect during this week on what your attitude is towards lying. Ask God in prayer for help to overcome this situation. Also make a commitment to Him to seek Him when you face the temptation to lie. Hebrews 4:14-16 gives us the promise that Jesus will understand and help us when we ask for help on time.



A Difficult Prophet

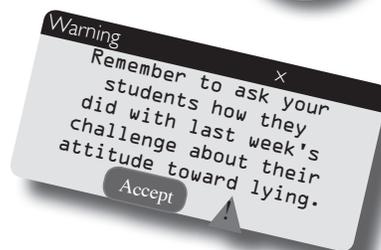
Lesson

43

Natalia Pesado • USA.

Objective: That the students understand the importance of serving God with their life.

Memory Verse: *And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?* Jonah 4:11



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk
- Instructions: Write “SERVICE TO GOD” in large letters on the board. Ask the class to describe some specific ways of serving God (for example, telling someone about Jesus, painting an elderly neighbor’s room, helping a young child cross the street, visiting those in the hospitals, etc.). At the end remind them that everything done for the glory of God and in the name of Jesus is a service to God.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: One sheet of paper and a pencil for each student.
- Instructions: Ask the class to make a time line (from “zero seconds” to “eternity”). Then ask them to draw a little arrow on the line marking the duration of different events or things (for example, to warm up a coffee (2 minutes), a television program (1 hour), a football match (90 minutes), homework (2 hours), etc.

1 min	1 hour	1 year
warm up coffee	a TV program	pass a year of school

Finally ask: When we serve God, how long will our investment last? The line is a visual example that help get a perspective of how much time it takes to fulfill certain activities, and that some things are momentary and others much more lasting (and perhaps more important). When we serve God, we are investing in something that will last for eternity.

Connect

Navigate

1. Fleeing from God

Read Jonah 1:1-17. There is not much information about Jonah, but we know one of the most important events of his life. God spoke to this man and asked him to go preach to Nineveh, because the inhabitants of that city were committing many evil things (vv. 1-2). The behavior of these people did not please God, and that would have negative consequences. However, Jonah decided not to obey Jehovah’s voice, and bought a boat ticket to Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction of Nineveh (v. 3).

It is sad to see that Jonah decided to flee from God and from His call. God is loving; Jonah 4:11 shows that God loves humanity. His love compels him to invite us to work with Him to give an opportunity of salvation to every human being. But Jonah’s selfishness was demonstrated in his lack of love and mercy for the inhabitants of Nineveh, and was a big obstacle in his service to God.

Jonah 1:1-10 tells us that God allowed Jonah to suffer the consequences of his stubbornness (vv. 4-17). Jehovah prepared a great fish that would swallow Jonah (v. 17). Although this seems like a punishment from God to Jonah, being in the stomach of the great fish saved Jonah from drowning in the sea. It also gave him the opportunity to pray and show repentance for his disobedience. God accepted the genuine repentance of his heart. In the prayer (2:2-9), Jonah described the terrible consequence of his disobedience. However, the prayer recalled that “salvation is of Jehovah” (2:9b). God is always willing to forgive a genuinely repentant person.

In Matthew 12:40 many years later, Jonah’s experience “in the belly of the fish” was compared to the experience of Jesus in the “heart of the earth”. Service to God includes sacrifice. Jesus did the will of the Father, even to the point of death.



Many times during our service to God, we must sacrifice time, money, comfort, etc., but it is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). God wants us to serve Him, and the purpose of service to Him is the salvation of many. Jesus also promised that those who believed in Him would do great things (John 14:12).

2. Preaching for God

God heard Jonah's prayer, forgave him and gave him a new opportunity to obey his command. God was still interested in using Jonah to preach to the people of Nineveh (3:1-2). We must remember that God is determined that His good and perfect will is fulfilled. Finally, Jonah went to Nineveh and preached the gospel. He witnessed all the inhabitants of the city, from the highest chiefs to the animals, fasting and mourning (vv. 7-8a). The mandate included crying out to God and turning from their ways (v. 8b). Upon hearing their cries, God forgave them (3:10), for He is unquestionably forgiving. When God calls people to His service, there is the assurance that His presence and power will be present. We should be encouraged and not let fear be an obstacle in our service to God (Ephesians 3:20a).

3. Fighting with God

Surprisingly, the book of Jonah continues to tell us in chapter 4 that Jonah became angry when he saw that God forgave those who lived in Nineveh. Jonah stated that he preferred to die of the indignation he felt at knowing that the inhabitants of Nineveh were forgiven rather than punished (4:1-3). Jonah recognized that God is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2).

While angry, Jonah decided once again to try to escape the presence of God and went to the field. God grew a plant to shade him from the blistering heat (v. 6), but after a day, he sent an insect that dried up the plant that had grown (v. 7). It is sad to read that Jonah continued to be angry. His anger was caused by selfishness and envy towards the people of Nineveh. Those feelings were obstacles that once again prevented him from serving God in a pleasant and effective way. God, in his great love for Jonah, continued to try to talk with him to convince him of His infinite love, not only for him, but for all humanity.

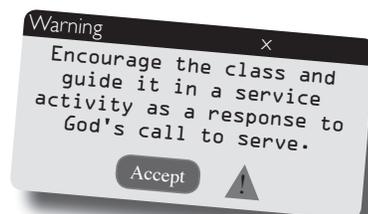
In the 4th chapter, we have the words of God to Jonah that reveal the quality of mercy that characterizes our God (v. 11 TLA), "Do you not think that I should worry and have compassion for the city of Nineveh? In this great city live 120,000 people who do not know what to do to save themselves, and there are many animals."

The most important thing for God is that people are saved, and He wants to use people to carry out this great task. There is no doubt that God can get His message to others in many ways, but He wants to work together with His children. The blessings received for serving God are more than we can imagine. They are not only material and perishable blessings, but spiritual blessings eternal and truly satisfying. Just as God worked patiently with Jonah to help him mature and grow personally. He also wants to work in each of our lives and invites us to join Him in the adventure of serving Him.

The important thing is that we know that the call to serve God is for everyone, perhaps in different ways, but it is for all of his children. God did not call us to judge. He alone is judge. When we take that place we lose the opportunity to serve effectively. The Lord is great in mercy and slow to anger (Psalm 145:7-9). We as his disciples must be wise in our interaction with people who share other beliefs or lifestyles. The call to be light must be fulfilled by being an example and communicating the love of God.

At the end of the lesson, encourage the students to pray and tell God about their fears, insecurity, lack of desire, etc. Ask them to take a moment to talk with God and tell Him honestly what is in their hearts. It is important to understand that we have the freedom to speak to God, that we can approach Him without reservation, and confess what we feel, whether it be pride, fear, insecurity, lack of desire and/or energy, etc. God can understand us and will treat us with the same love and patience he had with Jonah. God loves us and wants the best for his children. We can be sure that his plans for our lives are wonderful. God will show patience with us as he showed it before with Jonah.

Challenge: Say to your class: Have you ever felt God's call for some service? How did you respond? Always remember that God is interested in giving you the best, but that he desires that you serve Him. You do not have to be afraid of the future. Jeremiah 29:11 is a wonderful promise for your life! During this week, think of different ways you could begin to serve the Lord.





Objective: That the students understand that vengeance belongs to the Lord

Memory Verse: *I will repay says the Lord.* Romans 12:19c

Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Prepare a list of negative actions and assign each one a score. For example, killing a person - 30 points, lying - 15, stealing money - 17, disobeying parents - 24, etc. Paper and pencil.
- Instructions: Give a sheet to each student. Begin the activity by giving 100 points to each person, and explain that they will need 100 points to get in to heaven. Then read the list of actions with each score. When you read the action and the score, they should subtract those points from their total if they have ever committed any of these negative actions. For example, if someone murdered someone, they will subtract 30 points, if they have lied 15 - points, if they stole money - 17 points, etc. At the end, ask them to read their total after subtracted points for the bad actions. If at the end someone still has 100 points to enter heaven, give them a most cordial welcome. No one should have 100 points! This activity will help them understand that everyone, including us, deserves to be punished, but that God forgave us because he loves us and His infinite love covers many sins.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Case study Sheets: Case 1. Ms. Martinez murdered her husband one night when he arrived drunk and wanted to beat and rape his 7 year-old daughter. She took a pan from the kitchen and hit him on the head several times until he was unconscious. Case 2: Angel is a 17 year-old boy. He left for a party without his parents' permission. At the party he drank several alcoholic beverages. When he was driving home he hit another car in which a whole family was riding (dad, mom, a five-year-old girl and a one-year-old baby). The mother of the family died in the accident.
- Instructions: Divide the class into 3 groups and share the cases with each group. Ask them to decide which one should receive the death penalty and why. Allow time for discussion between groups. Finally, they must decide why they will condemn and why they will save people from the death penalty. Young people will understand that judging others is not so easy. There are moral implications for every decision that is made.

Connect

Navigate

“The one who does it, pays for it,” is an old saying. Certainly when a person is wronged, there is a desire to seek revenge. However, revenge neither replenishes the loss nor gives peace to the one who seeks it. In this lesson we will see that the act of revenge can only be exercised by God, and we must seek to forgive the offender or ourselves for some wrong decisions of the past. Read Genesis 34. It would be more interesting for the students to narrate the biblical portion as an anecdote. If there is a good storyteller in your congregation, ask them to prepare the story to share with the youth.

1. Dinah's Disgrace

In today's story, Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, was dishonored by Shechem. Shechem's father ruled the region. The Bible does not give us details of the incident, it only says that Dinah went out to visit the women of the place, that Shechem saw her and raped her. There are some points in this tragedy that we should consider: 1) It was forbidden for the Israelites to live with the Canaanites. The Hivites were ancient settlers of Canaan. 2) Shechem committed violence against Dinah and that is never justifiable. Different versions of the Bible clarify that Shechem forced Dina, other versions say that he raped her. In any case, it was a deplorable incident and an affront to the family.

Dinah's brothers, the other sons of Leah and Jacob, were furious when they heard what happened (Genesis 34:7). Maybe they were surprised because their father already knew about what happened and had not done anything. This was a huge offense to the family. When a person faces a similar situation such as rape, or death of a loved one by a drunk driver, or death of a relative by an assailant, the first reaction is revenge. That person has to pay!

In the Middle East, when a woman lost her virginity, it was a disgrace to her parents' house (Deuteronomy 22:21). Dinah could have been stoned (Deuteronomy 22:24). Her family would suffer shame and punishment. It was not something that could be hidden, the whole town would talk about them.



2. The reaction to the offense

The virginity of women is protected by the vast majority of cultures. Even today, among some Muslim cultures a woman who loses her virginity without being married can be punished with death by stoning, even if she did not consent to the action. If she is married and another man rapes her, her husband has the right to reject her. To redeem her fault, she can marry the rapist. (To learn more about this example, you can investigate on the internet the case of Gulnaz, a Pakistani woman raped by her brother-in-law and the sanctions to which she was subjected.)

The Israelite law indicated that Shechem could marry Dinah but later could no longer divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:29). Despite having forced her, Shechem had fallen in love with Dinah and wanted her as a wife. His father interceded for him trying to negotiate a marriage contract with Jacob and his angry brothers. He promised to give them a higher compensation than required if necessary (Genesis 34:11-12).

According to the customs of the time, the marriage contract established the price that the bridegroom had to pay to the father of the bride or her family (Genesis 29:18, Exodus 22:17, Deuteronomy 22:18-19). This was known as the “dowry.” However, Dinah’s brothers thought more of revenge than of coming to an agreement. They argued that Shechem was not circumcised and therefore could not marry their sister (Genesis 34:14).

For Israelites, circumcision was a visible sign of God’s covenant with them (Genesis 17). It was also practiced by others. Hamor and Shechem agreed to be circumcised so that Shechem could marry Dinah (vv. 18- 19). And not only would they be circumcised, but all the men of the town! This meant a great risk for the city because it left the city unprotected during the recovery period. This was Dinah’s brother’s purpose, since they had decided in their hearts to take revenge against their sister’s rapist. The “root of bitterness” that harms and poisons people had taken hold of them (Hebrews 12:15).

Talk with your students about the following questions: What feelings have you felt after finding out about an offense that has been committed against you or a loved one? What kind of revenge have you sought? In your anger, have you let yourself be carried away by doing something that you later regretted?

3. Revenge or forgiveness?

It is very difficult to control yourself when you are enduring pain as deep as the rape of a sister, the murder of a loved one, etc. Knowing that the culprit will get his due provides a hint of comfort. Most people want the guilty party to suffer, to pay for what they have done. This reaction applies to Christians and non-Christians. We all want “justice,” and what we mean by “justice” is to give each one his due. So if there is a culprit, he has to pay (this is also what current films and novels proclaim). For some, punishing the guilty is the only way to feel a bit of peace. When we cannot exercise revenge ourselves, we turn to God asking that fire descend from heaven and consume the evil ones (Luke 9:54). We want God to become our avenging agent and put an end to that person who shattered our lives. But on the other hand, we want God to always show us His forgiveness. How is that? “Kill him but save me and forgive me?” This is not how God’s justice works. God asks us to give up our desire for revenge, because:

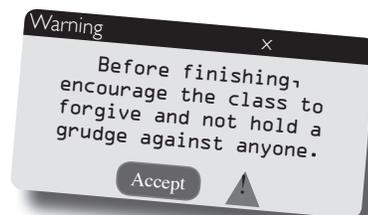
- It is a root of bitterness that will end up destroying us (Hebrews 12:15);
- Revenge (punishment) is only to be from God (Romans 12:19);
- God wants to restore even those whom we consider unworthy of all forgiveness (John 3:16 and John 4).

By forgiving in the way we ourselves were forgiven, we are freed from bitterness and we are free to love (Romans 12:17-18, 20-21). Understand that not seeking revenge does not free the offender from guilt. The culprit has yet to face justice, human and divine. But if the aggressor repents, he is as worthy of mercy as any other (John 3:17, 2 Peter 3:9).

Review/Apply: Ask them to define the following words (the definitions that we include are from the Webster’s dictionary and are only a guide for the teacher).

- Grievance: *An offense (word or deed) that is done against someone.*
- Revenge: *To avenge oneself or another, usually by retaliating in the same way or degree as the offense.*
- Forgiveness: *the act of forgiving*
- Mercy: *Compassion shown, especially to an offender.*
- Love: *Strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties.*

Challenge: Say to your class: Is there something you cannot forgive someone? Do you feel hurt or resentful toward someone? During the week, think of three people that you think have wronged you. This can be a good opportunity to renounce revenge and exercise forgiveness. Ask for guidance, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, reject revenge and offer forgiveness to those who have offended you. If necessary, talk with me or our pastor during the week about this.



God Fights For Us

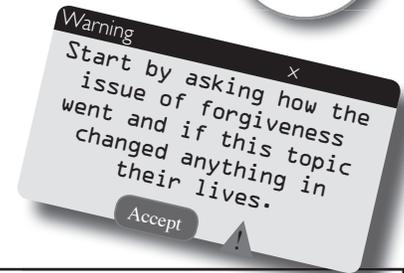
Lesson

45

Zeida Lynch • USA

Objective: That the students understand the security they have in God and that they can draw closer to Him with confidence.

Memory Verse: *Lord, you are my God; and I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.* Isaiah 25:1



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Bandages for the eyes. Some objects to serve as obstacles.
- Instructions: Form two groups. Prepare an obstacle course with the objects. A volunteer from each group must go through the course blindfolded and guided by one of his friends. The opposing group will try to distract him or confuse him with comments. At the end, ask those who were guided how they felt. Finally explain that in order to be guided by someone, we must trust in that person and let them guide us.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Bandages for the eyes. Objects that serve as obstacles.
- Instructions: Form two groups. Blindfold a volunteer from each group. Following turns, their group mates will guide him through the path of obstacles. For example, two steps forward or one step to the left, etc. At the end, ask those who were guided how they felt. Talk about what trust means in someone who guides us when we cannot see.

Connect

Navigate

The time of the kings of Judah was very varied. Some kings acted according to the will of God and we can find some verses that say "He did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 14:2; 17:3; 24:2; 25:2; 26:4; 27:2; 29:2; 34:2). But we also find others who did the opposite and the Bible says "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 21:6; 22:3; 28:2; 33:2; 36:5, 9; 12). King Jehoshaphat was a king who tried to follow the example of King David and sought to follow God and keep His commandments. During his reign, he endeavored to lead the people to seek God. He removed the places of idol worship and promoted the teaching of the Word of God throughout the territory. The neighboring nations feared to go to war against him. The Philistines and the Arabs brought him presents to gain his friendship (2 Chronicles 17:1-11).

1. Jehoshaphat sought God in his weakness.

Despite all the good things that Jehoshaphat did during his reign, he made a mistake: He made friends with Ahab, king of Israel (2 Chronicles 18:1). King Ahab was a king who did not love nor fear God (1 Kings 16:30). On one occasion, King Ahab invited Jehoshaphat to go to war against Ramoth of Gilead (2 Chronicles 18:3). Jehoshaphat first asked him to consult God through one of his prophets (2 Chronicles 18:4). King Ahab brought together four hundred prophets who said what he wanted to hear, not a true revelation from God (v. 5). Jehoshaphat realized and asked them to look for a true prophet of God (vv. 5-22). The prophet Micaiah said that this war would bring destruction to Israel. Although the prophet Micaiah prophesied the death of Ahab, Jehoshaphat decided to accompany him (v. 28). This did not please God, but he had mercy on Jehoshaphat because he had been a faithful king (2 Chronicles 19:1-4).

After a time, the nations of Moab and Ammon made war against Judah. The army of those nations was numerous (2 Chronicles 20:1-2). Jehoshaphat was very afraid and decided to seek God. It is interesting that the "seeking God" on behalf of Jehoshaphat was not only when the situation was against him, but it was a constant search (2 Chronicles 17:1-4). And even though he had done something that displeased God, Jehoshaphat continued to trust in His mercy.

On this occasion, Jehoshaphat humbled himself and asked the people to fast for God's protection (2 Chronicles 20:3-4). The action that King Jehoshaphat took in prostrating his face on the ground meant that he was desperate and afraid. Although the king feared the worst, he trusted Jehovah, since he had allowed him to remain king.

Faith in God should have no limits, and having no limits indicates that you can believe that something supernatural can happen. Many people gathered together with Jehoshaphat "and also from all the cities of Judah they came to ask Jehovah for help" (2 Chronicles 20:4). Jehoshaphat reminded the people of the power of God and how from generation to generation God had gone before them. During his prayer he recognized the greatness and sovereignty of God over all the peoples of the earth and the provision of the land they now possessed. He also mentioned the faithfulness



of God on their behalf. He remembered God's promise to hear them and save them when they cried out to Him from their temple. Finally, Jehoshaphat asked God for help against the nations of Ammon and Moab. He recognized his helplessness in facing a large enemy (2 Chronicles 20:6-12). Despite his desperation, Jehoshaphat did not initiate the prayer with the request for protection. First he worshiped God and He rested in God's faithfulness.

2. The Lord gave the victory.

What happened on the day of the battle was another example of God's great love for his people. While Jehoshaphat and the people were praying, the Spirit of God spoke to them through Jahaziel. He told them that they should not fear or be frightened in front of that great multitude of the enemy army, because God would fight for them. "You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you." (2 Chronicles 20:17).

What a beautiful promise! God himself can take care of any situation. It does not matter how big the problem is. For God, nothing is impossible. His children only need to trust and hope in Him. If God promised it, He will fulfill it.

Upon hearing the promise, Jehoshaphat along with the people worshiped and praised God. They believed God's promise, although it had not yet been fulfilled. They fully believed that God would do what he said through his prophet and praised God (2 Chronicles 20:19).

The next day, Jehoshaphat encouraged the people to believe and remain in God's promise and asked them to continue singing and praising the name of God. Jehoshaphat commanded "glorify Jehovah, for his mercy endures forever" (2 Chronicles 20:21). While they praised God, the miracle happened. God caused the armies of Moab and Ammon, who had gone to fight against Judah, to begin fighting among themselves until they were completely destroyed (2 Chronicles 20:22-24). Jehoshaphat and the people collected the spoils of war for three days. God gave them victory without them doing anything. God fulfilled his promise once more (2 Chronicles 20:25).

3. Joy in the power of God

Imagine Jehoshaphat's surprise when he saw how God fought for them and left their enemies dead. Only the power of God can do this!

How do you not feel joy when God answers your prayers like you desire. On different occasions, God gave victory in problems that seemed impossible to solve. It is important to recognize that with the help of God, victory can be obtained. Jehoshaphat and the army returned with joy to Jerusalem. They went to the house of God to worship him (2 Chronicles 20:27-28). The attitude of gratitude to God is part of our adoration to Him.

It is often easy to forget the favors God has given us. After solving the problem, the person forgets that it was God who gave the victory. King Jehoshaphat led the people to be grateful to God. During his prayer before the battle, he remembered the faithfulness of God to the people from the time of Abraham. After the battle, he led the people to thank God for the miracle granted.

During life, there are moments that bring happiness, and other moments that seem empty and hopeless. These situations help the person to mature (Romans 8:28). That is a powerful reason to always be joyful. Despite the circumstances, one must believe in God, just as King Jehoshaphat did (2 Chronicles 20:18). He prostrated himself, worshiped, trusted God and got what he expected: God's backing of his nation, life and family. That brought great joy to all the people, and great blessing that lasted several years. In addition, the testimony crossed borders, because the neighboring kingdoms then feared God (2 Chronicles 20:29).

We have to learn to depend on God, and He will always be at our side, being our fort and walled city. The story of Jehoshaphat teaches us to be sure that we can trust God when problems arise. God knows every situation or affliction, and wants His children to show confidence in Him. If we put everything in His hands, He will give us the victory. But to receive this victory, we must believe in Him and those who guide us in the teachings. The reign of Jehoshaphat enjoyed peace because together they relied on the mercy of God.

Review/Apply: Guide your students to answer the following questions and talk about them.

1. What is the danger in not choosing friends well? *They can divert us from our walk with God.*
2. Describe the prayer of Jehoshaphat in the face of the threat of Moab and Ammon. *He recognized the greatness of God. He mentioned God's fidelity. He remembered God's promises. He asked for protection.*
3. Why did God fight for his people? *To show His power and faithfulness to them and the neighboring nations.*
4. Why is it important to have an attitude of gratitude towards God at all times? *Because it helps us grow in faith. Remembering the goodness of God strengthens faith.*

Challenge: Say to your class: In today's lesson, we have remembered the goodness and mercy of God towards his children. Although Jehoshaphat was not wise in making a covenant with Ahab, God forgave him and delivered him from his enemies when he sought God in worship, repentance and faith. In the week ahead, think about your attitude lately and if you have acted without the guidance of the Lord. If so, ask for forgiveness and keep going. Remember that God loves you and his grace is infinite.



Rescued To Be A Blessing

Lesson

Natalia Pesado • USA

46

Objective: That the students understand the benefits of recognizing God's work in their life and how they can bless others.

Memory Verse: *Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him.* 2 Kings 12:2



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil for each student.
- Instructions: Ask them to make a list of blessings received throughout their lives (salvation, life and health, support people, abilities or special gifts, privileges that others do not have, etc.). Together with the whole class, reflect on the possible purposes of God in giving them such blessings.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Blackboard and chalk .
- Instructions: Divide the class into groups and ask them to write a list of the different experiences and / or privileges that people get as they grow (education- 5 yrs. old, drivers license - 18 yrs. old, etc.). Ask them to compare the levels of maturity required for each activity and reflect on the fact that Joash began to reign at seven years of age, when he was just a child.

Connect

Navigate

The life and the reign of Joash are not well known. However, his life stands out in history when compared to the lives and the decisions made by the other kings of Israel and Judah. The Bible teaches us that although young, Joash had the wisdom to know and follow the will of God. By being obedient, he made the right decisions and received the blessings of God. These were also extended to the people who were around him. God guided Joash's life from when he was very small, and Joash responded with faithful service to Him.

1. Joash's rescue

For reasons of politics and greed, King Jehu of Israel murdered King Ahaziah of Judah (2 Kings 9:27-28). Before this death, the mother of king Ahaziah, named Athalia, decided to seize the throne of the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 11:1). As a woman, she had no legal right to be recognized as a queen. To achieve her purpose, Athaliah ordered all the heirs to the throne be killed - all the descendants of the royal family, including the sons of King Ahaziah (her own grandchildren). Greed and hunger for power got in the way of her love for her family.

In 2 Kings 11:1-21, we see that Joash was one of those grandchildren. Because of the wisdom and courage of his aunt Josaba, he was rescued (v. 2). God was very attentive to Joash's life, and used his infinite power and wisdom to prepare the people and the plan that would be necessary to preserve his life and protect him from harm. Josaba's courage is to be admired, since to be found with the child and challenge the new Queen Athalia, could have sentenced her to the death penalty. God is wonderful, and even when Joash was only a child, God poured great blessing and protection over his life. In Isaiah 55:8-9, the prophet Isaiah provides a summary of this wonderful way God cared for him.

It must be recognized that all human life is part of God's perfect plan and has a spiritual and eternal purpose. This truth applies even to difficult moments in our lives.

2. A new home for Joash

2 Kings 11:2 says that Josaba took Joash to live in the temple with Jehoiada the priest. Josaba was probably Jehoiada's wife and that is why they lived in the temple. The chapter does not detail the family atmosphere in which Joash grew up; however, due to the way he acted during his youth, it can be assumed that Josaba and Joiada provided a healthy home for Joash, as well as strong religious teaching.

2 Kings 11:4-16 tells how Jehoiada the priest, a man of great authority and influence, led the soldiers of the army. Surely they felt joyful and full of hope when they saw Athaliah's end approaching. The people were tired



of her because they had realized how bloodthirsty she was. The priest trusted the captains and the chiefs of the guard of Israel (v. 4), and gave them clear and precise instructions regarding Joash's security (v. 8). This was very important because if Athaliah realized that an heir to the crown was alive, she would find a way to end his life.

In 2 Kings 11:10-21, we read about King Joash's coronation ceremony. This occasion was very important for the people because they would have a king from David's lineage. Athaliah had not been invited to the coronation of the new king. When she heard the noise, she went to the temple (v. 13). The priest Jehoiada ordered that they take her out of the temple, but she tried to escape, which led to her death (v. 15). Although the decision was radical, it must be understood that the choice to assassinate Queen Athaliah was to prevent any further uprising against the king. This brought peace to the city. Surely the king would need help since he was very young, and who better than Jehoiada to guide him (v. 17).

This passage shows once again the sovereign hand of God over the life of Joash, by providing a family that protected him and guided him in an ideal way. Although Joash was orphaned at an early age, we see that God provided people to care for him and provide for each of his essential needs, including love, education, guidance spiritual, protection, shelter and food.

3. Joash as king

In 2 Kings 12, we read the details of Joash's reign, which lasted forty years. The reign of Joash was exemplary, especially when compared to the reign of other kings of that time who brought much conflict, spiritual darkness and sadness to the people. The worship of Baal reigned at that time and came to Judah. People went to the temple but also worshiped Baal. Today we see this too; many attend church on Sunday and behave religiously but during the week they live without following God's Word and wonder why they do not grow in their spiritual life. In 2 Kings 11:18-21, we see the beginning of a great revival for the people of Judah, who decided to put an end to everything that distanced them from the true God. This can be the beginning of a revival in our lives as well, when we decide to leave everything that does not allow us to serve the Lord and live a holy life.

In 2 Kings 12, we see that Joash reigned 40 years and did good in the eyes of Jehovah (vv. 1-2), restored the divine worship, and repaired the temple. Joash truly loved God and put him first in his life. As a sign that God was his priority, Joash decreed that the money that would come through the offerings would be administered by the priests so that the cracks in the temple could be repaired. The temple was the symbol of God's presence among his people, and investing money in it was a wonderful example of honor and devotion to God. The priests had needs and took money for their families from the temple (v. 7). They were slow to start the work of repair (v. 6), so Joash encouraged them to take this work seriously, and once more he gave them the order to begin the repair (v. 7). It is easy to imagine, that during this time, the town was quiet. When a ruler has the right priorities, the people can enjoy peace.

Joash used the blessings he received to bless others. Although he was orphaned, God gave Joash the privilege of being the head of a large family, which he led with responsibility and diligent work. We cannot deny that when God intervenes in one's life, although the beginning may be difficult, with His guidance everything can work out for good (Psalm 91:14-16).

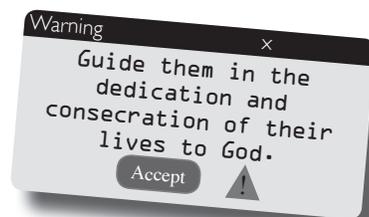
In this chapter we also see that Syria took Gath (v. 17) and Joash paid Hazael king of Syria in order to get away from Jerusalem (v. 18). Joash died by a conspiracy of his servants and Amaziah his son succeeded him (v. 29).

Guide the students to reflect on their own lives. In the circumstances that they have lived from their childhood, difficulties they have endured or problems in school or in the neighborhood. It is also very healthy and fair to think about the many blessings that God has poured out in their lives. The young king Joash made the decision to serve and be a blessing to others, now it is our turn. What will you decide to do with your life? Decide today to be the difference wherever you go and in whatever position you find yourself.

Review/Apply: Ask them to make a list of the specific and personal blessings they received from God and how they use it or can use it to bless others.

- Blessings Received (Ability to play an instrument. Patience with children.)
- Blessings Given (Serve on Worship team. Teach Children's Church.)

Challenge: Say to your class: What perspective do you have about your life? The challenge of today's lesson is to strive to give control of your life to God and develop "spiritual eyes" that allow you to see the great blessings that God has poured out on you, and how you can use them to bless others. Mission possible! During this week, prepare a list of things that you must consecrate to God, and a list of how you will use them to bless others.



A Man of God

Lesson

47

Loysbel Pérez • Cuba

Objective: That the students imitate Gaius' character qualities.

Memory Verse: *I have no greater joy than to hear than my children are walking in the truth.* 3 John 4



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- **Materials:** Inflated balloons. Insert a paper with the name of several biblical characters from the lesson inside each balloon before inflating.
- **Instructions:** Form two teams and ask for one volunteer from each. He/she must sit on the balloon until it bursts. The first one that pops the balloon must say some qualities of the character they find in the balloon.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- **Materials:** Small box and pieces of cardstock with character qualities written on them. (kindhearted, companion, faithful, affectionate, etc.). A circle on the board.
- **Instructions:** Write the qualities on pieces of card. Place them inside a box. Ask each student to choose a card, read the quality, give an example of that quality, and then paste it in the circle that is stuck on the board. After all the qualities have been completed, ask which biblical characters have those qualities.

Connect

Navigate

1. The practice of truth

Begin by reading 3 John 1-4 and then ask: What does it mean to walk in the truth? John defined walking in the truth in his first letter. Walking in the truth is:

1. Having fellowship with the Lord, living in the light, turning away from sin (1 John 1:6).
2. Recognizing that we have sinned and need His forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9).
3. Keeping and living His commandments (1 John 2:4).
4. Loving in truth (1 John 3:18-19).

Practicing the truth is synonymous with integrity. Integrity is being consistent with one's convictions. Gaius was an example of integrity. He was a believer who had received and known the gospel of Jesus Christ. Despite trials and persecution, he lived according to what he believed. John heard about the faithful behavior of this man, and mentions it in the letter he wrote to him (3 John 3). Gaius walked in the truth and manifested it in each moment, even in times where being a Christian could bring serious persecution.

The people with whom we relate must know that we belong to Christ, that we follow Him, and that everything we do is to please Him. Even the non-Christians who are around us must recognize it. This way we will be showing that we walk in the truth and practice the truth.

2. Fidelity and obedience.

Gaius' faithfulness to God was intimately linked to his obedience. He taught that the moments or circumstances in which one lived were not obstacles to being faithful and obedient to God. Being obedient to the Creator of this world is not an unattainable goal, but it does represent a daily battle against oneself and against the devil. To be faithful and obedient, it is important to:

- Read the Word of God. We must delight in it! (Psalm 1:2)
- Live every day in constant relationship with the Holy Spirit, for without Him, nothing will be achieved (Jude 20, Romans 8:14).
- Not give in to temptations, but remain firm and say no to those who try to distance us from God (James 4:7).



- Not do what goes against what is believed and taught in God’s Word, even if it goes against your group of friends (Genesis 39:9).
- Attend all the activities and services of the church with the purpose of relating more to God and participating in fellowship with the brothers and sisters (Hebrews 10:25, John 13:35).

In John’s words spoken to Gaius, there is a relationship between faithfulness and obedience in our daily lives (3 John 5-6). Faithfulness includes the desire to do the right thing. Obedience is the desire or intentionality to do what is commanded. That is why when a person is faithful, he will want to be obedient. Obedience must be part of our faithfulness to God.

3. Love and service to others

A follower of Christ must live a life of hospitality and service. (Hebrews 13:2; Romans 12:13). Service opportunities occur constantly in our lives. We should not leave it to others, nor refuse to do as our Master did who “came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20:28). It is good to point out that in Gaius’ hospitality, service and love were shown even to those he did not know personally. 3 John 5, “even if they are strangers to you.”

Paul expressed, “Let us not be weary, then, of doing good ... So, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:9-10). We must dedicate part of our time to helping and serving others. There are many ways to serve. We only need the intention and the desire to do it. There is a popular saying that says, “those who want to do something find the means, those who do not find excuses.”

This quality in Gaius is an example for the believers of today. Gaius had the task of hosting and serving missionaries who carried out the task of spreading the Gospel (3 John 8). They left the comforts of their homes to take the gospel to different places. Gaius was not called to be a missionary, pulpit preacher or evangelist; however his contribution to God was to serve and host those who had that call.

We must do what God wants us to do and let Him use us to fulfill His purpose in our lives. It is an important part of the universal plan of salvation carried out by the divine trinity. Referring to this, Barclay says the following, “If life has put you in a situation in which you have to continue with secular work, continue in the same place and with the routine obligations of life; but where you cannot go, your money and your prayers and your practical help can. Not everyone can be, as it were, on the first row; but by supporting those who are there, one can become an ally of the truth. We must remember that giving everything for the greater work of Christ and his church should be considered not an obligation but a privilege, not a duty, but a pleasure.” (Commentary on the New Testament, William Barclay, Volume XV, Clie, Barcelona: 1995, p. 71).

What Gaius’s life illustrates to us is that we must do everything in our power so that the Kingdom of God may spread throughout the world, even if we are not the ones who carry it directly (3 John 6-8; 2 Corinthians 12:15). Ask: What are we doing for the kingdom? What can we do to spread the gospel in our city, state, country or in the world?

The condition in which one lives, the physical imperfections, or the low economy in one’s pocket are not obstacles to serving God. He called us to the most wonderful work in human history, that is, the preaching of the gospel, the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of believers. God gave us excellent qualities, and reading examples of the qualities of people who are recorded in his Word is an encouragement and worthy of imitation. Gaius was an example for the Christian church of the first century because he knew how to be faithful to God and hospitable to his brothers and sisters. But what will we do today for God and his church?

Review/Apply: Guide your students with the following questions, and then ask them to share their answers. (Here we give the answers to the lesson but allow them to say them in their own words).

1. How can you be a young person obedient to God?
 - *Read the Word of God daily.*
 - *Live every day in direct relationship with the Spirit Holy.*
 - *Do not give in to temptations.*
 - *Do not do what goes against what you believe and have learned in the Word of God.*
 - *Attend all the activities and services of the church with the intention of learning more about God.*
2. What did you learn about Gaius’s life that you did not know, and what can you put into practice?

Challenge: Say to your class: During the week, ask your parents, your pastor, me or a youth leader for three qualities that they observe in your life. Then think of three actions you can take to show those qualities in service to others.



The Authority of Christ

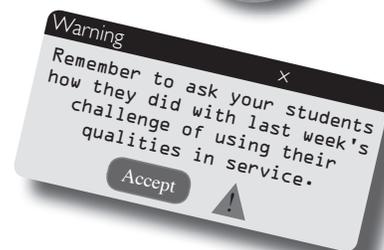
Lesson

48

Jessica Nogales • Spain

Objective: To motivate the students to have faith in Christ's authority and power, and demonstrate this faith through what they do.

Memory Verse: *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.* John 14:12



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Instructions: Divide the class into three groups and assign each group one of these people (Stephen - Acts 7:59, Peter - Acts 3:1-8 and Paul and Silas - Acts 16:22-40). Each group will act out the main scene that is narrated in the biblical passages, only changing the names. The other groups will guess who the person is and the story. The group that guesses first will be the winner. Stephen died for his faith (Acts 7:59), Peter healed a lame man by faith (Acts 3:1-8) and Paul and Silas risked their lives and were put in jail because of their faith in God (Acts 3:1-8, 16:22-40). Let them see that faith was and should be a Christian's motivation.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Several pieces of white paper, four pieces of paper of another color and a box.
- Instructions: Put the pieces of white paper and three of the other color in the box. Pass the box around to each student and ask them to observe carefully. When the box has gone around, secretly add the fourth colored paper. Ask them how many color papers they saw in the box. Have them defend their claim. Most will say there were three, then you will show them there are four. The purpose is to encourage them to defend their convictions even if others say otherwise.

Connect

Navigate

Jesus was entering the last stage of his earthly physical life. He had come to Jerusalem and many people were calling out to him, others were waving branches along the path he passed. However, despite all that Jesus was experiencing, his heart was not entirely happy. Luke 19:41 says that Jesus wept for the city. He knew everything that was going to happen; he knew that the people who exalted him at that moment would reject him later. Therefore, he did not want his disciples to be the same as the crowd that followed him. He wanted to make sure that his disciples learned to be true followers of his, faithful and firm in what they believed. For this reason, he always gave special lessons to them, things that others could not hear, and He took advantage of any resource at hand to do so. One of these occasions was with the sterile fig tree and the other when the Pharisees challenged his authority, found in Matthew 21:18-27.

1. The sterile fig tree

Matthew 21:18-22 tells of when Jesus went to Jerusalem after staying in the city of Bethany. On the way, he was hungry and when he saw a fig tree, he approached it; but when he saw that it had no fruit, he cursed it and instantly it dried up. How many times has something similar happened to us? Surely we have wanted to find something or someone, and if we don't, we get angry and maybe we even argue. In the case of Jesus, it was different. Jesus did not act out of anger for not finding what he wanted. Jesus always did things with a purpose, and he used everything to teach something new. On this occasion, Jesus took advantage of this situation to teach two important things to his disciples.

First, when Jesus saw that the fig tree was barren, that is to say, it did not have fruit, he cursed it and the fig tree dried up. This is a graphic representation of what can happen to those who now follow Jesus but do not bear fruit. God equipped His followers with gifts and talents to use them in His name, for the extension of His Kingdom and the building up of His people (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 14:12, Ephesians 4:11-12). These gifts must always be available to be used to serve Him in all that is necessary. Jesus will return and ask for an accounting of everything that was done and not done in his name and for Him. Matthew 3:10 teaches that if God does not find fruit in His followers, He will throw them into the fire.

Second, in Matthew 21:21-22, Jesus gave his disciples a lesson in faith and authority. Jesus did not want simple hearers to follow him out of emotion. He wanted and wants his disciples to be people of faith who are convinced of



who God is and who remain firm in spite of everything.

Ask: What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 gives the answer. Conviction means: "Religious, ethical or political idea to which one is strongly attached". Certainty means: "Clear and sure knowledge of something; Firm adherence of the mind to something knowable, without fear of erring" [[http:// www.rae.es](http://www.rae.es)]. That is, having faith is having the security of something or someone. Faith is demonstrated through works (James 2:17). That same faith leads the person to act when he is convinced of something. Nothing can change that conviction; we live and act accordingly. When someone is convinced that Christ is the Savior and has authority over all things, then the power of God will work through them. The person who has faith and allows himself to be guided by God will be able to do things they never imagined according to God's plan for their life.

Peter never imagined that God would heal through him as his Master did. Paul even took the gospel of Christ to more places than Jesus himself; but this has already been said before by the great Teacher in John 14:12. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater will he do, because I go to the Father." It can be said that through the figure of the sterile fig tree, Jesus taught that one must have faith in his power and authority, and that having that faith, our service to Him will bear much fruit.

2. The authority of Christ

In order to understand this part of the book of Matthew, we must remember the previous events of Jesus entering the city of Jerusalem. In Matthew 21:12-17, the Bible states that Jesus purified the temple. Jesus found that the people who were selling did not act correctly; he even called them thieves. Jesus brought order in the temple that was his Father's house. This made the priests and elders of the town very uncomfortable, so when Jesus returned to the temple, they approached him and asked him a very special question: "With what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23b)

Previously, Jesus had taught his disciples that they should have faith in him, in his power and authority. Then came these men, questioning the authority with which he did all these things. The first thing that shows in these men is pride and arrogance. By the way they formulated the question to Jesus, they implied that they felt superior or had greater authority than Jesus himself. Perhaps this feeling arose because they knew the Scriptures or because they were the leaders of a religious movement. The second thing is that they did not know who they were addressing. In the midst of so much knowledge, there was a great ignorance regarding the promises of God.

This is a warning for the present. The Christian can become prideful, believing they know a lot about God, but they do not really want to surrender completely to Him. These men believed they knew God, yet they had Him before them and they did not recognize Him. It is not the same to know about God as to know Him. The first thing is a simple knowledge; the second is to know Jesus personally. Jesus said that everyone who knows Him knows the Father (John 14:9). Beware of conceit and spiritual pride which can generate distrust of God's authority. Ask: How well do you know God? The more we know God, the more we trust him.

Continuing with the story, Jesus answered this question with another question: "John's baptism, where did it come from? From heaven, or from men?" (Matthew 21:25) This other question had an intention. Jesus knew that he would put the priests and elders of the temple in trouble because John the Baptist was known as a prophet of God and many followed him (Matthew 14:5, Luke 3:1-18). Obviously, Jesus knew that John did everything in the name of God, and did not ask them that question out of ignorance but to make them understand that He also did things in the name of his Father. The chief priests and the elders of the town preferred to say that they did not know in order to avoid admitting that Jesus was the son of God. Once again, the pride that was in their hearts came out. Jesus did not respond to them since they did not respond to Him, but it is clear that the answer was in His question (Matthew 21:26-27). Jesus promised that He will return again. When He returns, He wants to find a crowd of people who praise Him from the heart. Jesus taught His disciples, and through their example, His church will have faith in Him. "Because we are members of one another."

Review/Apply: Ask them to answer the following questions:

1. What does Jesus expect from us when he returns? *He hopes to find us working for Him and presenting the fruit we have achieved.*
2. According to Matthew 3:10, what will happen if Jesus does not find fruit in us? *He will throw us into the fire.*
3. According to Hebrews 11:1, in your own words, what is faith?
4. How can I demonstrate Christ's authority in my life? *By being obedient and keeping His commandments.*
5. According to the lesson, what keeps some people from trusting in Christ's authority? *Pride and spiritual arrogance.*

Challenge: Tell your class: Christ is challenging you to be a disciple who has a genuine faith in His power and authority, a faithful servant who does not doubt who his God is and who works with the desire to bring Him fruit that pleases Him. Are you willing to do this? I encourage you to commit yourself before God to live from now on with more faith, demonstrating it in your daily life at school, at home, with your friends, etc. Try it this week and share what happened.



Joy in the Resurrection

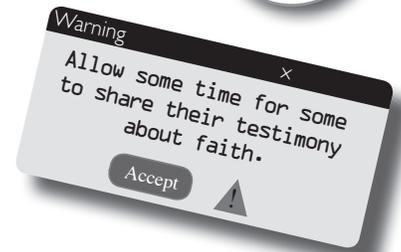
Lesson

49

Yeri Nieto • Mexico

Objective: That young people affirm their faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of fear and doubt.

Memory Verse: *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*
John 20:29b



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Two boxes and 12 cards. Six with biblical questions and on the other six, punishments.
- Instructions: Place the cards with questions in one box and the punishments in the other. Each student must choose a card and answer the question or perform the punishment. They can only answer the biblical question or, if they prefer, receive a punishment (notice that it can be a difficult question or an easy punishment, or vice versa). But there is only one of two options. There will always be doubts and fears in the decision-making process; the important thing is that we act and do not get immersed in those fears or doubts.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: White sheets and pencils.
- Instructions: Ask them to show through a drawing something that causes them fear (spiders, dogs, closed rooms, darkness, heights, etc.). If someone does not fear something specific, they can show fear of a situation (unemployment, betrayal, death of a family member, etc.). Then ask them to show it to the class so that they guess what it is about. Many fears make a person doubt himself, but the Lord can change this.

Connect

Navigate

John 20:11-18 tells us what happened to Mary Magdalene, whom the risen Jesus himself called her name and told her to tell his disciples that he was going to meet the Father. Some of the reactions of the disciples to the news of Mary Magdalene may have been: "Is all this true that Mary Magdalene tells us? Maybe she had a hallucination because of the enormous sadness that she feels. How could she see Jesus, we all know he is dead? Maybe she saw an angel?"

1. A word for fearful people

On the night of that same Sunday of Resurrection, the disciples were in terrible fear of several doubts: Would the Roman authorities accuse them of having stolen Jesus' body? Would the Jewish leaders begin to retaliate against anyone who pronounced even the name of Jesus, or would they persecute them as they persecuted their leader until they crucified him? What decisions would they make from that moment, when the person who led them for three years had already disappeared? And if what Mary Magdalene said was true, what would happen? That night, Jesus entered into the place where they were gathered. The Bible says that the doors of the house were closed (John 20:19), which is an evident expression of fear. To many people, closed doors provide security. That is the reason why so many people put padlocks on the doors of the house, or double lock the entrances at night to feel safe. The disciples were afraid and locked themselves in to feel some security. But Jesus burst in. With his resurrected body, Jesus went through walls and doors and stood in their midst! And, before showing them the wounds and giving them certain instructions, he told them five words that would bring to the disciples what they needed, "Peace be with you!" (John 20:19, NIV). Jesus Christ, who always told them that He was the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6), who always reiterated to them that He was the water to quench their thirst (John 7:37-38), who constantly made them see that He was the bread of life that came down from heaven (John 6:35), and had told them that He gave them peace in the midst of tragedies (John 14:27; 16:33), now he said to them again, "Peace be with you!" And this is the first



teaching of the risen Christ for today: Amid fears (not being accepted, staying single, failing an exam, sharing the gospel, etc.), He bursts in and says, “Peace be with you!” Fear is natural, but Christ causes these fears to be defeated in His peace. And His peace abounds (Philippians 4:7).

2. The news for unbelievers

“He went through the walls, like that, nothing else?” Thomas might have asked, which is like saying, in a mocking tone, “Now tell me a ghost story!” Thomas was a disciple whom Jesus had called to follow him. He was part of the twelve, except he had not been locked in the house when Jesus had arrived. And obviously, he doubted about what his colleagues said. But he should not be judged severely. Many also have their own doubts, and often leave God’s ways due to those doubts. Thomas did not abandon Christ, only doubted what had happened (John 20:25-26). Doubt is a natural response of a human being. The dictionary defines doubt as a hesitation of the mind. That is an intrinsic issue, something that belongs to the soul. This means that doubt arises in people, not as something they have thought about, but as a natural response to a situation that does not fit with reality. Therefore, it is normal that Thomas doubted: Jesus was alive? And he appeared to his companions and spoke to them? Thomas probably asked again and again, “But you touched him?” And the others answered, “No. It was not necessary, Thomas! ... although the Master showed us his wounds.” “But did you touch them?” And then Thomas expressed that he wanted to see and touch the Master, and only then would he believe.

Jesus broke into the scene again. It was not common for a dead person to be resurrected, much less to appear suddenly. But the risen Jesus visited the disciples a week later in the house, and on that occasion, Thomas was already among them. A week of doubts for Thomas! A week of hesitation! A week wishing that Jesus, if he really lived, would appear once again! And Jesus Christ burst in on the scene again, and after greeting them with peace, He turned to Thomas (John 20:28). The Scriptures point out that the Jesus’ words sufficed for Thomas to immediately exclaim, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28, NIV). In the end, Jesus Christ expressed a phrase that is the best news for people: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (20:29, NIV). Faith, shown in believing in Jesus even though one has not seen or touched Him, is the best formula for being happy.

3. A call to affirm our faith

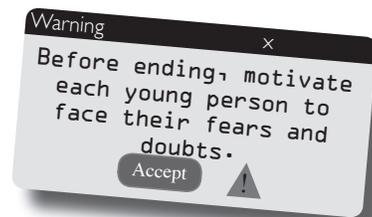
The event of the risen Christ calls us to confront our fears and doubts. Many people are afraid to think about death, but the resurrection of Jesus is a word of hope for them. If God the Father raised Jesus from the dead, He Himself will raise His children also (2 Corinthians 4:14). There will be no eternal death for the believer! Death will not be the end for the children of God (1 Corinthians 15:55). Death is a transition event, a step towards eternity. One should not fear what may happen. Nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:28-39). It is also natural to feel doubts. Doubts are not bad, they are even necessary to move forward, to define the decisions more precisely, to do something better.

In the same way, the resurrection is a message for unbelievers. Their doubts are not bad, but if the person lives submerged in them, they will become incredulous - people who do not believe in anyone or anything. Beings unable to live a faith (denying God, denying hope or a better future), unable to be faithful to a person (a couple, a friend) or an institution (the school, the church). The risen Christ today says again, “You are blessed if you believe even if you have not seen”; in other words, “You are happy if you live by faith.” Faith can refer to many things, but in the Christian perspective, faith refers to Christ. We believe that just as Christ was resurrected, so we will be resurrected with Him, so that together with Him we may live eternal life. And this day is the day to celebrate the resurrected life in Jesus Christ.

Review/Apply: Ask the students to answer the following questions honestly:

1. What does the resurrection mean to me, besides being a biblical story and a historical reference?
2. How can I live each day in light of Christ’s resurrection?
3. How does Christ’s resurrection affect my doubts and fears?
4. How can I share the news of the resurrection so that others can live free of fears and doubts?

Challenge: Say to your class: This week we will specifically pray for our fears and doubts, that we will really know and believe that Jesus Christ’s resurrection is an event that goes beyond history, allowing us to live a resurrected life.



A Different Day

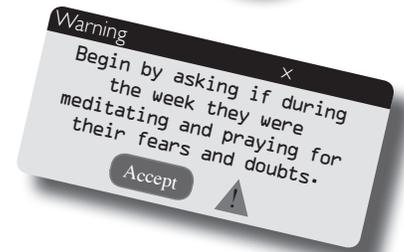
Lesson

Hilda Navarro • Mexico

50

Objective: The students will learn about the circumstances previous to Pentecost Sunday, and apply valuable lessons to their life.

Memory Verse: *They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.* Acts 1:14



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper.
- Instructions: Write each word of Acts 1:14 on different pieces of paper and divide some of them into syllables. Hide them around the room. Ask your students to search for them and decipher the message. It is a team task, highlight the importance of staying together with the same purpose.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: A large card with the text of Acts 1:14.
- Instructions: Cut the card with the text of Acts 1:14 into small pieces. Form groups of two or three people and give each group a few pieces of the same text. Ask each group to put the puzzle together. After trying it and not being able to form the text for lack of pieces, ask them to try as the whole class to join all the pieces. In order to achieve a common purpose, we must all work together.

Connect

Navigate

The Lord Jesus Christ had left! What would happen with his disciples now? Would they really be willing to continue obeying now that their friend and teacher was not there? What would happen to them now? Would they be willing to continue witnessing everything they had experienced up to now? They probably asked themselves more than once, "Am I from Him and is He fulfilling His work in me?" Jesus Christ left clear instructions to his followers. So clear, that all they had to do was follow them to the letter.

1. A group with a defined purpose.

Read Acts 1:12-14. Ask: Have you ever walked a kilometer as part of a Christian movement? Maybe you have done it in some camp activity, or distributing leaflets somewhere or on a trip to a special place, or to attend an event in a distant church. The passage in Acts 1:12 indicates that the disciples were walking to get to Jerusalem. It was a Jewish day of rest. According to their customs, they should not do any work on Saturdays, and the distance they could walk was relatively short. Approximately 1.08 kilometers was the distance that was considered lawful to walk without breaking the law. The Jews were very careful and respectful of their customs, especially customs of the Sabbath.

On this occasion, the disciples were on the Mount of Olives on a Sabbath and had to go to Jerusalem. It is estimated that the distance from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem was just about one kilometer. The Mount of Olives was a place that is mentioned several times in the Bible. In 2 Samuel 15:30-32, it says that David went up to the mountain weeping when his own son Absalom was persecuting him. On that mountain, Ezekiel contemplated the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 11:23). And it was also the place where the Lord Jesus Christ used to spend the night and where he had his agony of prayer before being taken prisoner to be crucified (Luke 22:39).

From there walking, the disciples arrived in Jerusalem and went to a very special house. The place they went to had an upper room. The Hebrew houses had an upper room, usually built on the roof and which usually had its own staircase independent of the rest of the rooms. In some books of the Bible, this expression is translated as "summer room", "reception room", "chamber" or also "attic". They were, in general, the most ventilated and comfortable rooms in the house, and were used especially in summer for respected or distinguished guests. Whose house was it? Perhaps this is the same large upper room where they had celebrated the last Passover and



the first Communion with the Lord (Luke 22:12). It has also been suggested that the “upper room” was in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, a meeting place for Christians in Jerusalem.

2. A unanimous and fervent prayer group

Among this group that met in the upper room was Simon the Zealot (Acts 1:13). He was also known as Simon the Canaanite or “the Canaanite”. A “zealot” may mean anyone zealous of Jewish law, or maybe it meant that Simon was a supporter of a political group known as the Zealots.

Ask: Are you part of a united group that works with defined instructions?

Ask students to read Acts 1:13-14 and note the names of the people who formed this group of walkers. The people mentioned were the 11 disciples (Judas Iscariot had already died), as well as some women including Jesus’ mother. In Acts 1:14, Jesus’ brothers are also named, together with the disciples. During Jesus’ life, they did not believe that He was the Messiah (John 7:5), but his resurrection must have convinced them. Jesus’ special appearance to James, one of his brothers, must have had a special meaning that influenced their conversion (1 Corinthians 15:7). Some suggest that the term “women” may refer to the wives of the disciples.

Then, there was a group that had a defined purpose: Obey the instructions that Jesus had left with them before leaving. In Acts 1:4, Jesus asked them to return to Jerusalem and wait for the fulfillment of his Father’s promise about the coming of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26). All of this group longed for the fulfillment of the promise because they knew that it was necessary to be able to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). For that reason, they persevered unanimously in prayer (Acts 1:14). The unanimous term indicates that all were with the same feeling, in the same spirit. They were not only together, but they were in unity of purpose. He also says that they persevered, that is, they continued persistently, it was a constant, continuous attention, they clung to prayer until the answer came.

Christians should be aware that when there are situations that require help, it is best to pray. When there are worries, there’s nothing better than to pray. The disciples had to carry a great work forward, and before beginning it, they prayed fervently to God. They were aware of the need for the fulfillment of the Father’s promise in their lives. Although small in number, they were 120 people (Acts 1:15). This group understood that those who prayed were the ones in the best position to receive spiritual blessings. They were united by a very strong bond that allowed them to persevere unanimously in prayer.

Above all, at that time it was very special for the disciples of Christ. They were preparing for Pentecost! This celebration was important for the Jewish people, and the disciples expected the outpouring of the Spirit that Christ had promised.

Ask: Are you part of a persevering prayer group? It is very good to belong to a group conscious of the importance of fervent prayer. If so, consider those who are part of your personal group.

Ask: How many times have you met with your peers or personal friends to pray, hoping to have a special time with the Lord Jesus? When faced with a difficult task or an important decision, the first step should be to pray for the direction of the Holy Spirit. Is there something that was not completed in the group, or in the church, or in your own life? Is there something we started that we know is God’s will and we have not finished it?

Encourage the class to seek God in prayer, waiting for His guidance at all times. It is also important to stress the importance of setting aside time to pray for each member of the group. You can start today.

Review/Apply:

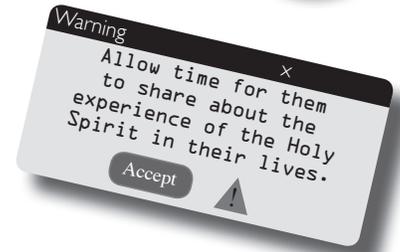
1. Guide the students to write a list of things they need to change in their lives regarding habits, friendships, etc.
2. Encourage them to write a commitment to God to pray for those changes to take place.
3. Have the students divide up into small groups to pray. Have the groups take prayer requests from each other and spend time in prayer.

Challenge: Say to your class: Imagine you are part of the 120 who prayed in the “Upper Room”. What things must you do before God sends the power of His Spirit? Is there something that keeps you from fulfilling God’s will? Are you willing to correct some of those situations? During this week, pray about those matters with fervor. Ask God to send his Holy Spirit into your life, just as he did with the disciples.



Objective: That the students learn from Joseph's character qualities and desire to apply those qualities to their life.

Memory Verse: *Joseph son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.* Matthew 1:20b



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil for each group.
- Instructions: Divide students into groups of three or four. Allow time for each group to write a list of the characteristics of an ideal parent. After three minutes, ask them to share their answers and make a single list on the board.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Paper and pencil for each student.
- Instructions: Ask: How would you respond to the betrayal of a close friend or boyfriend or girlfriend? They should write their answers in one sentence. Then they will paste the papers on the board and talk about them.

Connect

Navigate

When the Christmas story is told, Mary is often given more attention. This is normal because she received the visit from the angel Gabriel, she carried the son of God in her womb, and she gave birth in a stable. So much attention is placed on Mary that sometimes we see Joseph as a minor character in history and we relegate him to being nothing more than “Mary’s husband.” In contrast, Matthew gave almost all of his attention to Joseph’s experience. We could say that this Gospel tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Joseph’s perspective.

1. Joseph was just and merciful.

It does not take a lot of imagination to know that when Joseph found out about Mary’s pregnancy, it was a very difficult situation. Joseph probably felt betrayed by his girlfriend and even disappointed in her parents. Maybe thoughts like, “Why did not they take care of her more?” Or “With whom did she deceive me?” To make things more confusing, his bride desperately denied having been with another man, claiming to have conceived by the Spirit of God.

The Law granted Joseph the right to divorce Mary and condemn her to death by being stoned (Deuteronomy 22:20-24). God takes adultery seriously! However, the Bible says that Joseph, “since he was righteous, and did not want to insult her, wanted to leave her secretly” (Matthew 1:19). In this way Joseph would free Mary from suffering the punishment prescribed for an adulteress.

Sometimes we reduce justice to “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Deuteronomy 19:21), but Joseph’s justice went much further. He decided that while he would not be contaminated by an adulteress, he would abandon his right to revenge, forgiving Mary. Having the normal evidence of an infidelity (a pregnancy), Joseph chose mercy and discretion.

His decision was very similar to what Jesus said years later, “to anyone who strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also ... and anyone who forces you to carry a load for a mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:38-41). From his limited perception, Jose had received a slap, but he turned to Mary his other cheek also. The betrayal he felt was the first mile, but to forgive Mary without understanding what was happening was the second.

In the church, the same fruit of justice must be had: On the one hand, determination not to participate in the immoral, and on the other hand to give people the benefit of mercy and discretion. Instead of seeking only to expose injustice and have revenge, we must act with mercy. That way we will not run the risk of condemning the innocent. In the case of Joseph, the Lord was faithful and sent his angel to clarify the situation.

Ask: Have you ever experienced a betrayal? Have you ever experienced what seemed like a betrayal? How did you respond? Discuss ways to handle difficult situations with the same attitude that Joseph showed.



2. Joseph received revelations from God.

Matthew 1:22 indicates that at the time of the angel's visit, Joseph had been thinking deeply on everything that was going on. Joseph was not going to make a hasty decision that was focused on the pain he felt. It would be a just response.

In the midst of this anguish, God interrupted him. "An angel of the Lord appeared to him" (v. 20). While Joseph was humbly and meticulously processing his merciful and apparently just decision, God suddenly interceded. Leaving Mary would be a devastating mistake. The legitimacy of the conception of the son of God would be in doubt, God would not let this wrong be carried out.

Many times we want a word from God, but we do not look at the problem with the same humility and purity of Joseph. When the search for a just response is not backed by pure intentions, no revelation can be received from God. It was Joseph's justice that made him fit to receive a revelation from God. And what a message he received from the angel! He received a new name, son of David. He was not only Jacob's son or Mary's husband (Matthew 1:16). As a descendant of David, the chosen lineage of Israel, God wanted Joseph to marry Mary and guarantee the Davidic lineage of Jesus Christ.

The angel also let him know the origin of the Child; the baby had been begotten by the Holy Spirit. In addition, the angel commissioned Joseph to name the Messiah; it was Joseph who named the Savior who was to be born. Finally the angel honored Joseph, letting him know in advance the mission of the Messiah. When many had thought that the Savior's mission would be something political or racial, Joseph knew that the purpose of the Christ was spiritual, to save His people from their sins.

Joseph received dreams from the Lord again and again during Jesus' childhood (Matthew 2:13-23). Those dreams led Joseph to make decisions that guaranteed the safety of the Son of God, and was an important instrument in fulfilling prophecies about the arrival of the Messiah (Matthew 2:6, 15, and 23).

3. Joseph was a man of conviction.

Matthew 1:24 says that when Joseph woke up, he immediately took action doing what God had told him to do. This obedience was the direct result of his conviction. By believing the Lord's message, Joseph stopped fearing, took action and helped fulfill God's plan.

Joseph's conviction was characterized by immediate obedience. Joseph could not explain how his bride had conceived through the Holy Spirit. However, he took Mary as his wife. Also, in Matthew 1:25, Joseph gave the boy the name "Jesus", exactly as the angel had told him.

This immediate obedience is observed many times in Joseph. When the Lord warned him of Herod's intention to kill the child, he fled at night with the baby and his mother (Matthew 2:14). When the angel told him to return to Israel, he returned. When he was told to settle in Galilee, he led his family to live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:21-23). Joseph obeyed totally based on the information he had received from the angel.

To ensure that there would be no doubt about the conception of Jesus through a virgin, Joseph did not touch Mary until after the birth. Without this event, there would be no proof that a virgin had conceived. Joseph let his conviction overcome any personal desire.

Guide your students to reflect on their convictions and their daily actions.

To see God do great things, one must act immediately by making difficult decisions that others may not understand. We must remember that God has all the information, and if we obey Him, He will fulfill the good work He initiated (Philippians 1:6). Is there something in your life that the Lord is telling you to do? Do not worry! Act in accordance with your convictions.

Review/Apply: You may use these questions during the lesson or at the end of it. (The answers are only a guide).

1. How would you respond if you found out that your best friend had betrayed you?
2. Which two aspects were included in Joseph's just response when learning about Mary's pregnancy?
 - *One: the determination not to be defiled by an adulteress.*
 - *Two: the decision not to publicly disgrace Mary, so he was going to secretly divorce her.*
3. According to what we have studied, what should be the response of a truly just person when facing a betrayal or an injustice? *Strictly contemplate an answer that confirms your convictions against sin, and at the same time shows mercy and protection for the apparent offender. Trust that God knows everything that has happened. Abandon the thought of seeking revenge. Forgive.*
4. What made Joseph fit to receive revelations from God? *His justice, his righteousness. His search would be for a correct answer to his situation. His pure intentions.*
5. What are the two aspects of conviction that we see in Joseph's life? *Immediate obedience and determination when making difficult decisions.*

Challenge: Say to your class: During this coming week, think of people you think have betrayed you and decide to forgive them. If you have the opportunity to talk with them, do it to clarify the situation. This is an attitude worthy of admiration.



A Challenge for the New Year

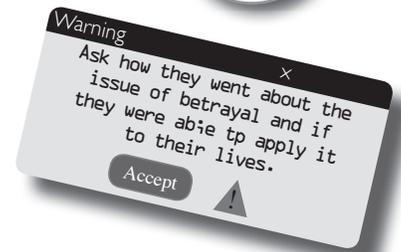
Lesson

Ulises Solís • Guatemala

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Objective: That the students will follow Jesus as an example for living.

Memory Verse: *Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.* Hebrews 12:1



Connect

Navigate

Introductory Activity (12-17 years)

- Materials: A rope, blackboard and markers or chalk.
- Instructions: Tie two student's ankles together with a rope. Then ask them to run to a place in the classroom or outside of it. Surely they cannot or it will be very difficult for them. Then ask: What should we do so that they can run freely? Unfasten your feet and ask them to run again. Encourage both and the class to write on the board how they can associate this with the spiritual life. We have to see life as a race, and when less things hold us down, the better we can run.

Introductory Activity (18-23 years)

- Materials: Obstacles (chairs, tables, etc.), things to load (books, bags, coats, etc.), blackboard, chalk or markers.
- Instructions: Organize a race. Between the line of departure and the goal, place chairs, tables or other obstacles. Ask participants to carry books, coats or bags. Try to put many things on top of them so that it is difficult to run. Leave a corridor with very little load. Run the race. Ask the rest of the class to give their opinion about the race and how it compares to the Christian life. Write the answers on the board. We must see life as a race, and when we are less burdened with sin, we can run it better.

Connect

Navigate

Goals are important for life. We need them for every project we undertake, whether in spiritual or personal matters. All our actions and decisions must have the goal of being a good disciple of Jesus Christ. This will make us good students, good sons and daughters, good professionals, good citizens, etc. Reading Hebrews 12:1-3, we see that the writer perceived that the believers he was addressing were going through trials and were tempted to give up. They had a certain degree of conformity in their discouragement, because they had no desire to run or to advance in their spiritual life.

1. A challenge for the young man of today.

The writer of the epistle urged the Hebrew Christians to look back, to the past. He made a tour of history (Hebrews 11) mentioning people they knew who had been faithful to the Lord. They could find a lot of heroes of the faith on that list. People who, because of their faith in God, could be an inspiration to their lives.

Ask your class to read Hebrews 11:24-25. Ask: What did these champions of the faith choose? They chose to be mistreated rather than enjoy the temporary delights of sin. They risked everything to maintain their faith in God. Ask: According to Hebrews 11:29-34, in what kinds of situations did these people live? They crossed the Red Sea, the walls of Jericho fell, Rahab did not perish, "they conquered kingdoms, they did justice, they reached promises, they covered the mouths of the lions". They went through miraculous situations where they verified the faithfulness of God in their lives.

Ask: According to Hebrews 11:36-37, what did these people experience? "Others experienced persecution and scourging and more prisons and jails. They were stoned, sawed, put to the test, killed by the sword ..." These brave heroes went through various trials and remained victorious. In the same way, Christians today have the same challenges and opportunities in the new year.

The heroes of faith mentioned in chapter 11 of Hebrews are examples worthy of imitation. Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and ask: What did the writer want to teach with this passage? What does it teach us today? Life is like a race that is ahead, and sin becomes an obstacle that prevents progress. For this reason, before we run, we must get rid of sin in order to move forward more easily. To have victory and win the race, we must put aside the full weight of sin. In some cases, the weight and sin can refer to bad friendships or harmful habits such as pornography, illicit sex, drugs, or anything that affects our relationship with God.

How will we be able to get rid of the weight of sin? Ask them to read Hebrews 4:14-16 and answer the following questions: Who acts as a high priest? (Jesus, the Son of God) Did Jesus sin? (No. Jesus was tempted, but he never gave



in to temptation.) Was He like us? (Yes, in all ways.) Can Jesus help us today? (Yes, because he also fought against sin and won.) It is important to get away from sin and look to Christ. Sin produces a huge weight that does not allow us to advance in the Christian life. Therefore we must live away from sin in holiness by faith in Christ and endure with patience what we live.

2. The model for the new year

After looking to the past, and seeing the heroes of faith, there is a challenge to look to the present and future with a look at Jesus. Ask them to read Philippians 3:10-13. Paul, because of the Lord, experienced many sufferings because he wanted to be similar to Jesus in his death and resurrection. He also set his goal on the prize of the supreme call of God. As children of God, we must be ready to suffer for the sake of faith, but we must also be ready to receive the Holy Spirit, his blessings and mercies.

The challenge for this new year from the first day should be to trust only in Jesus and not look to other people. Then your faith will be renewed and hope strengthened. It is important to see the Christian as a good athlete, who takes care of his life in a disciplined way, living in purity and faith in the Lord Jesus, ready to evade, overcome and cross all kinds of obstacles until the end of his days. But it is important to start doing this one year at a time, one week at a time, one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time or better yet one second at a time.

In the light of the Word of Christ, we are already winners if we say no to sin and run with our eyes on Him. When we think about the goals of the new year, let's not forget to put Christ as a model, as the champion and supreme example to imitate. Jesus already ran this race and conquered it for us and for all those who receive him as Lord and personal Savior. That is why only in Christ are we more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

3. Being winners

To be overcomers, it is important to persevere and be willing to live for the Lord today and every day of the new year. When circumstances in school, the office or university are difficult, you must look at Jesus; this is the secret to success (Hebrews 12:3).

In this new year, it is important to take into account the following:

A. Evaluate. Before beginning the new year, it is good to evaluate how you acted and walked with the Lord in the year that is ending. For this it is good to ask: How was my performance at the university, or at school? How did I testify of Christ at school or university? Did I disciple someone this year? Did someone disciple me this year? Was I involved in some type of ministry in my local church? Did I fulfill the assigned ministry efficiently? Was I responsible with my work schedule? These questions at the end of the year will help you evaluate and change what went wrong, and ask the Lord for help before setting goals.

B. Rethink. God is a God of opportunities, so we can start the new year by asking ourselves the following questions: What do I want to accomplish during this new year in order of priorities? This will help us to set goals. Of course, this implies commitment, an arduous task of undertaking a strong battle against discouragement, against sin and against bad company.

C. Have a defined goal. Start the year with a clear goal in each area of life (study, family, relationships, spiritually, etc.).

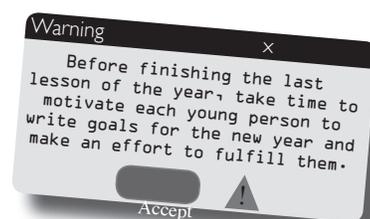
D. Have a spirit of victory. It is important to live the 365 days as a child of God who wants to honor Him. Living one day at a time with a self-examination will help us to see how much progress we make by the end of the year.

Jesus is true and is the overcomer of death and sin. But to conquer this was not easy, the battle against sin took him to the cross; he died there but on the third day he rose again to save us and give us eternal life.

Review/Apply: Divide the youth into groups and ask them to answer the following questions:

1. To run the race that lies ahead, who should be our source of inspiration and motivation? *Jesus*.
2. Jesus lived like us, but what was the supreme difference? (Hebrews 4:15) *He never sinned*.
3. To renew my faith and hope, what should I do?
4. According to Hebrews 4:16, when should we seek Jesus? *In time of need*.
5. How should we approach him? *Confidently*
6. What are we going to receive? *Mercy and grace*
7. How many people did you share this message with this year? How many disciples?
8. What about next year?

Challenge: Say to your class: This week, think about some goals for the new year and write them in order of priority. Pray for them, and let God tell you if they are right. Share them in the next meeting with your classmates. This will give you a greater challenge to fulfill them.





On many websites, we find the invitation to "click here." It is like a door to connect to new information. That is why this material is called Click, because the goal is to connect young people with the Word of God. This material is based on the Bible and specially prepared with the young generation of our church in mind.

This book contains seven units that include studies on the ten commandments, teachings of Jesus such as the parables and the beatitudes, social crises, among others.

We hope that this material will help you in the great task of guiding your young people on the Christian journey and connecting them with the Word of God.

Click and start a new adventure!

