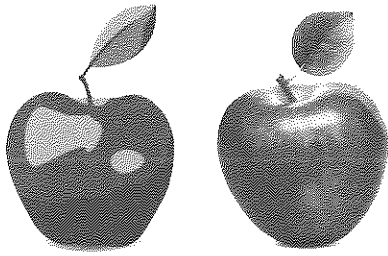


Wake Up!

LESSON 1



Topic

Biblical realities

Theme

God wants us to live by Biblical realities and to have a real impact on the world.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will take steps to ensure he is living according to Biblical realities and impacting the world.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 2

Scripture Focus

Rom. 13:11–14; 1 Cor. 15:30–34; Eph. 5:3–17

Summary

“Living in the real” means to live in reality rather than a dream world. As believers, we are prone to sleepwalk through life and miss what is real. The apostle Paul wrote to three churches about waking up spiritually. They were “oversleeping” and causing serious problems that had eternal consequences. This lesson will examine the alarms Paul sounded. The passages should challenge us to be living according to Biblical realities and having a real impact on the world.

Outline

I. Our Flesh Wants to Live in Dreamland

- A. Our flesh demands control
- B. Our flesh creates false realities
 - 1. To be in control
 - 2. To escape responsibility
 - 3. To gain recognition without commitment
 - 4. To relieve guilt over sin
 - 5. To excuse indifference and inactivity

II. God Calls Us to Live in the Real

- A. Awake to righteousness (1 Cor. 15:30–34)
- B. Put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:11–14)
- C. Walk in the light (Eph. 5:3–17)

Memory Verses

“Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:14–16).

GETTING STARTED

Spiritual Sleepwalking

ASK: Share a time when you witnessed someone sleepwalking. How did the person respond to you?

ASK: Tell about a time when you walked or talked in your sleep. (Q1)

Sleepwalking can be quite scary. Some people even sleep drive. A young woman used to get up in the middle of the night, drive down the highway to her brother's house, honk the car horn, and then drive back home. To keep her from doing it again, her friends tied her to her bed each night.

ASK: How might you describe "spiritual sleepwalking"? (Q2)

All of us as believers have a tendency to spiritually sleepwalk through life. Without realizing it, we become out of touch with reality. God wants us to live in the real and have a real impact on the world, so He has given us Biblical realities for life. This course will challenge us to live in light of those Biblical realities.

Alarm

ASK: What wakes you up each morning? Alarm? Spouse? Internal clock?

ASK: Describe a time when failing to wake up on time caused you a lot of problems.

The apostle Paul wrote to three churches about waking up. They were "oversleeping" and causing serious problems that had eternal consequences. This lesson will examine the alarms Paul sounded. The passages should challenge us to be living in the real and having a real impact on the world.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Our Flesh Wants Us to Live in Dreamland

A. Our flesh demands control

The importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is covered in lesson 6.

God is real, and He wants us as believers to live in reality (Heb. 11:6). That sounds agreeable. But living in reality is not something you just decide to do. It is a lifelong battle made up of daily decisions to follow God in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 6:11–14; 7:22, 23).

As sinners, people believe the lies that there is no higher person than self and no higher purposes than personal satisfaction, pleasure, and recognition. Even as believers, our flesh, or sin nature, believes these lies. Our flesh desperately wants us to live according to them. It is committed to the lies, never wavering in its dedication and devotion. As a result, our flesh will create its own world and call it reality if we choose to live according to our flesh.

READ: Isaiah 53:6. **ASK:** What clear message does this verse give about our flesh, our sin nature? (Q3) *Everyone has turned away from God and thinks his own way is true and best.*

READ: Proverbs 12:15. **ASK:** Why is the person who thinks his way is right called a fool? (Q4) *Because he puts his confidence in what is untrue.*

The word “reality” could be substituted for the word “way” in both Isaiah 53:6 and Proverbs 12:15. Everyone creates his own reality, believes it is true, and turns from God, the ultimate reality. Without God’s intervention on our behalf, we would all be forever lost.

B. Our flesh creates false realities

After placing our trust in Christ for salvation, we as believers should know better than to create our own reality, but we do it anyway. We can put our reasons for creating false realities into five categories.

1. To be in control

Some of us want to create a world in which we are at the controls. We want to call the shots in our lives and determine what is right and wrong. Our reality makes it okay for us to write all the “rules” to our own liking. God does not have the ultimate authority in the world we create for ourselves.

2. To escape responsibility

Others of us want to create a reality that excuses us from the responsibilities of being a believer. We see living the Christian life as a burden and perhaps even a bore. When we consider living for Christ, we see a list of restrictions and demands instead of a Person. Our reality explains away the demands of being a Christian. We are too busy, not talented enough, or too overwhelmed with life to contribute to the cause of Christ.

3. To gain recognition without commitment

Some of us create a world in which spirituality is just for show. We seek recognition for being spiritual under false pretenses. We want people to praise us for what they think we are. They don’t really know us though. We appear to be a good Christian worthy of recognition when we are privately living in sin. We are professionals at jumping through the right hoops, saying the right words, and doing the right things when those we want to impress are watching. We might even accept leadership positions in a church to bolster our reputation as a godly Christian.

4. To relieve guilt over sin

Relieving guilt is another reason for creating our own reality. We enjoy sin and don’t like to feel guilty or convicted when we sin. So we make up our own world in which our sin is okay. Perhaps we see our background, upbringing, or our life circumstances as legitimate reasons for our thoughts and actions. We see ourselves as a special case that God understands.

5. To excuse indifference and inactivity

There are those of us who think we simply don’t matter to God and that He

doesn't care what we do in our little corners of the world. We imagine a God Who is too big to bother with us. So we do our own thing in life as if it doesn't matter in the end. We live as if God is far away and too distracted to keep track of us. We are indifferent toward spiritual things and inactive in God's work.

ASK: What other reasons might a believer have for creating his own reality? (Q5)

ASK: Which of the reasons for creating one's own reality have you seen in your life? (Q6)

ASK: Which ones do you recognize in your life right now? (Q7)

II. God Calls Us to Live in the Real

God directed Paul to write to three different churches about living in the real. Obviously this is not a new problem. The three passages in Paul's letters help believers wake up to reality.

A. Awake to righteousness (1 Cor. 15:30–34)

Some in the church at Corinth had created a reality that made it okay for them to be involved in indulgent sins. Paul addressed the church with a wake-up call.

Paul put his life on the line daily for the sake of the gospel and the doctrine of the resurrection in particular (1 Cor. 15:30, 31). Paul even "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (15:32), perhaps a reference to literal wild animals. He willingly lived in jeopardy of his life because God is real and worth living and dying for.

Paul's life of jeopardy stood in stark contrast to the indulgent lives of some of the Corinthians. The indulgent Corinthians rejected a future resurrection of believers in order to excuse their sin. They created their own reality in which what they did with their bodies did not matter. If God was not going to resurrect their bodies, then they concluded that their behavior in their bodies would affect neither their present nor their future. They believed they should live for pleasure now for perhaps "tomorrow" they would die (15:32). They were hedonists through and through.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:3–8. **ASK:** How established is the reality of Christ's resurrection? (Q8) *Over five hundred people saw the resurrected Christ, including Paul.*

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:20–23. **ASK:** What is the important connection between Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of believers? (Q9) *Christ is the firstfruits of believers who have died. Christ will raise them up because He rose from the dead.*

Denying a future resurrection of believers is to deny the reality of Christ's resurrection. The two are forever linked. The Corinthians were bold in creating a reality that denied the resurrection in that it struck at the core of the gospel. Obviously, Paul took their actions seriously and called on the rest of the church at Corinth to respond.

Those who denied the resurrection were corrupt and in a sense "contagious." The Corinthian believers who embraced the true doctrine of the resurrection need-

ed to separate themselves from those who denied the resurrection (15:33). They were in danger of embracing the hedonistic outlook on life if they continued to fellowship with the evil ones in the church.

Paul told the Corinthians to wake up to righteousness and resist living in a dream world (15:34). They could not just make up reality because reality is based in God's person. All attempts at reality outside of God are dreams and lies. To create a new reality would be to change God. That cannot happen.

READ: Malachi 3:6; Psalm 102:24–27; James 1:17. **ASK:** What do these passages teach about the changeableness of God? (Q10) *God could never change. His nature demands He stay the same. He could not become bad because He is holy. And He could not become holier because He is already perfectly holy.*

Paul went on to point out that the Corinthians needed to resist living in a dream world because some did not have a knowledge of God (1 Cor. 15:34). The Corinthian believers were God's vessels for shining the light of the gospel before the lost. If they as God's vessels were filthy, then the gospel's light would be dim and rendered ineffective. They needed to live righteously before the wicked.

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:34. **ASK:** How should the Corinthians have responded to Paul's condemnation of living in a dream world? (Q11) *They should have embraced Biblical realities, starting with the resurrection, and lived according to them.*

The "dreaming" Corinthians were entertaining sinful indulgences instead of concentrating on winning the lost to Christ. They were enjoying fleeting moments of pleasure instead of sharing eternal life with those facing eternity in the torments of the Lake of Fire.

Imagine the Corinthians watching unbelievers plunged into the Lake of Fire as they call after them, "I'm so sorry you are about to experience agonizing, eternal torment. I was too busy living in my own dream world to tell you about the reality of eternity without God." Such a scene would never happen, but it is what Paul wanted the Corinthians to consider.

Lesson 12 expands on the need to witness to the lost in light of coming judgment on them.

DISCUSS: How should we respond when we understand the connection between reality and eternity? (Q12) *We, like the Corinthians, should wake up! We should find the connection between reality and eternity sobering. We should be motivated to live in light of Biblical realities.*

B. Put on the armor of light (Rom. 13:11–14)

Paul gave the Romans a similar message about living in a dream world.

READ: Romans 13:11. **DISCUSS:** Why is "sleep" a good analogy for living out of touch with reality? (Q13) *When we sleep, we are unaware of what is actually going on around us. Instead, our minds operate in a dream world. While we are asleep, our dream world seems real.*

Paul called on the Romans to awake out of sleep as the reality of Christ's return drew near (Rom. 13:11, 12). The "night" refers to the present time when

Christ is not on the earth and Satan is working. The “day” that is at hand is the return of Christ. In a sense, the return of Christ is always at hand because Christ’s promised return is at any moment (Rev. 22:7, 12). We are to be living with urgency because our time to serve God and reach others for Christ in this age is limited.

Paul again used the day and night contrast as he described how the Romans should live in light of Christ’s return (Rom. 13:13). Paul told them to cast off the works of darkness such as carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife, and envying. These six works of darkness fit into three broader categories of sins of gluttony, impurity, and temper.

The Romans were to put on the armor of light (13:12; cf. Eph. 6:10–18). The armor of light would keep them from putting the works of darkness back on.

READ: Romans 13:12, 14; Ephesians 6:10–18. **ASK:** Why would putting on the armor of light be the same as putting on the Lord Jesus Christ? (Q14) *Christ is the armor of light. He is our truth (John 14:6), our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30), our peace (Eph. 2:14), our shield of faith (Gen. 15:1), our salvation (Ps. 27:1), and Word of God (John 1:1).*

Putting on the armor of light and putting on Christ are both akin to living in the real. Our lives should be characterized by Christlikeness. That happens only when we live in God’s reality rather than in the dream world created by our flesh. That is why Paul told the Romans not to make any provisions for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Rom. 13:14). To make “provision” means to plan out ways to indulge the flesh.

DISCUSS: What might stimulate a person to make provisions for the flesh? (Q15) *Not dealing with sin in his life; feeding his sin nature with sinful stimuli; not strengthening his new man through the Word and prayer.*

The armor of light protects us from living according to lies. Our flesh wants to live a lie and the devil is always working to get us to adopt one (Eph. 6:11–13). Appropriately, “truth” is associated with the first piece of the armor we are to put on. We put on the belt of truth by immersing ourselves in God’s Word, the source of truth. Attached to our belt of truth is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (6:17). So our protection from living in a dream world begins with truth. And that truth, as found in the Word of God, then becomes our offensive weapon to defeat the devil and his lies.

The belt of truth protects us from temptation, and the sword of the Spirit helps us beat it back. Putting on the armor of light, beginning with the belt of truth, is crucial to living in the real.

C. Walk in the light (Eph. 5:3–17)

Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians and Romans are echoed in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8b). “Goodness and righteousness and truth” (5:9) characterize those who walk as “children of light.” Conversely “children of disobedience” are characterized by a whole litany of sins (5:3–5). God’s wrath comes on those who walk as “children of disobedience” (5:6). Paul wanted the Ephesians to find that fact motivating. If they did not shine the light of God’s love to the lost, then how would the lost escape the darkness and God’s coming wrath?

Paul pointed to the role of the Spirit in making it possible for a believer to walk

in the light (5:9). “Goodness and righteousness and truth” is the “fruit” that comes from living by the Spirit. “Goodness” is showing love to others. “Righteousness” refers to our character from God’s perspective. Other people will see our righteous character in our actions. “Truth” is essentially reality. We live according to God’s Word, the source of truth, when we live by the Spirit.

The more we walk in the light, the more in touch we become with reality. We learn what is acceptable to the Lord (5:10), and it begins to show in our lives.

As we walk in the light, our lives will be in stark contrast to the “darkness” around us. Paul told the Ephesians to “reprove” the “unfruitful works of darkness” (5:11). As we walk in the light and live in reality, we will expose people’s lives for what they truly are. The realities they have created for themselves will be shown to be lies.

DISCUSS: What are some of the lies the lost order their lives by? (Q16) *Life is about getting as much pleasure as possible; life is about becoming a good person; life is about following and fully realizing your dreams; life is about finding your place.*

We have an obligation to expose “unfruitful works of darkness.” God expects our lives to serve that purpose (5:12, 13).

READ: Ephesians 5:12, 13. **ASK:** How might a believer expose “unfruitful works of darkness”? (Q17) *By showing unconditional love, by living a pure life, by praising God in all circumstances, by sharing the gospel; by emulating Christ; by living with joy and peace.*

God wants us walking in the light instead of “sleeping” (5:14). Paul told the “drowsy” Ephesians to “awake.” They needed a dose of reality. “Look around you, Ephesian believers!” Paul essentially told them. “The world desperately needs to see the light of the truth! Stop living in darkness like the lost so they will see the truth and respond.”

The word “circumspectly” in verse 15 means to look around. We must take time to look around us and consider reality. Doing so is wise. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s perspective and responding accordingly. Ignoring reality is foolish.

Our time to walk in the light and introduce the lost to the reality of Christ is limited. Paul instructed the Ephesians to redeem, or buy up, their time (5:16). “Time” refers to a critical period of time or a special opportunity. Every believer’s life is critical to the cause of Christ. Your life is critical to the cause of Christ! That is reality!

Instead of seeking to make sense of life, finding our way, or trying to build a legacy, we should be focused on understanding God’s will (5:17). That means living in reality. The Bible reveals reality. It contains all the Biblical realities for life we need to know. This course will help you recognize those Biblical realities so you might live wide awake and might walk in the light as Christ intends.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Real Evaluation

ASK: Have you been living in a dream world or in reality? What would you cite as evidence of your conclusion? (Q18)

ASK: What advantages might you hope to gain by living in a dream world? (Q19)

ASK: Do you fear living according to Biblical realities? What are those fears? (Q20)

Answering questions like these takes more than a few moments. Sometimes we have so carefully constructed our lives that we fail to see we are living in disobedience to God. And our flesh is going to fight to convince us that we are fine. A true evaluation of ourselves should be ongoing and guided by Scripture and the Spirit. This course will help that process.

Back to Reality

RESOURCE: Display resource 2. **ASK:** What could you do to begin to live according to Biblical realities? (Q21) Give learners an opportunity to add to the following ideas included on resource 2.

- Be honest with God about your life.
- Take sin in your life seriously.
- Block out extended periods of time for prayer and renewal of your relationship with God.
- Put on the belt of truth by studying God's Word daily.
- Strap on the sword of the Spirit by memorizing Bible verses that speak directly to your tendency to live in a pretend world.
- Study the Biblical realities in this course faithfully and thoughtfully.
- Seek godly counseling from your pastor or a trusted fellow believer.
- Find an accountability partner to specifically monitor whether you are living in the real.

ASK: What will you do to begin to live according to Biblical realities? (Q22)

Have the learners record specific actions to take. Follow up on their plans of action at the beginning of the next class time.

If you already have a deep, personal relationship with God, continue to foster that relationship. It takes daily effort. Use the Biblical instruction in this course to encourage your spiritual life. And seek to help others in their walk with God.

Summary and Memory Verses

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add a summary statement for lesson 1 or use the following: Wake up to reality!

Encourage learners to memorize Ephesians 5:14–16. Give them an opportunity to say the verses in class next week.

