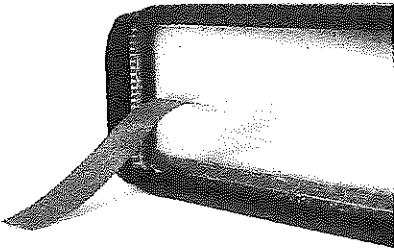


The Powerful Sword



Scripture Focus

Matt. 4:1–11; Rom. 1:16–31; 12:1, 2; Eph. 4:21; 6:10–17

Summary

This lesson examines the power of God's Word as the discerner of our hearts and as our defender in spiritual battles. The learner is encouraged to unleash the power of God's Word in his life.

Topic

Power of God's Word

Theme

God's Word is a powerful discerner and defender.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will take steps to unleash the power of God's Word in his life.

Materials

- Resource 10
- Visual 5

Outline

I. The Power of God for Salvation

- A. Man's powerlessness
- B. The Word's powerfulness

II. The Power of God for Sanctification

- A. The Word as discerner
- B. The Word as defender
 - 1. Jesus' pattern
 - 2. The Spirit's precision

Memory Verse

*"With my whole heart have I sought thee:
O let me not wander from thy commandments.
Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"
(Psalm 119:10, 11).*

GETTING STARTED

Power at Your Fingertips

ASK: What is the most power you have ever had at your fingertips? (Q1)

Perhaps the controls of a sports car or the trigger of a weapon.

ASK: Describe your respect for the power you wielded? (Q2)

This lesson takes a step back from the more academic study of the Bible to consider its power in our lives. In reality, we could all say that the Bible is the most powerful thing we have had at our fingertips.

Super Power

Give each learner access to colored pencils or markers and a copy of visual 5. Learners consider what powers they might like to have if they were a superhero and then create a symbol for their super suit using one of the crests on visual 5. Give several learners an opportunity to share their powers and symbols.

ASK: How would you use your super powers?

ASK: How do you think your life would be different if you had such power always at your disposal?

This lesson considers the power of God's Word. In a way the Bible's power is like having a super hero like weapon always at our disposal.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Understanding Bibliology and defending it against attack can become such a focus that a believer loses sight of the fact that the Bible is the most powerful book in history. Because of its power, the Bible should be more to us than something we interact with academically. The Bible should be a power source in our personal lives and ministry. God gave us the Bible to positively affect our lives.

I. The Power of God for Salvation

The Bible's power addresses humanity's basic need for salvation. Romans 1, Paul's discourse on salvation, begins at the same place.

A. Man's powerlessness

Romans 1 presents the case for humanity's guilt before God. It demonstrates that every person is a sinner in need of God's grace and that everyone who rejects God's grace is condemned by God and subject to His wrath.

In Romans 1:18, the word *suppress* better expresses the meaning of the word translated *hold*. The verse refers to people who have the truth about God but refuse to acknowledge it. Thus, God's wrath falls on them.

READ: Romans 1:19, 20. **ASK:** Why does no one have an excuse for not

Romans 1 was introduced in lesson 1 in the discussion about the revelation of God.

knowing God? (Q3) *Creation reveals God's invisible attributes and testifies that there must be a God.*

God's wrath falls on sinners because they deliberately deny God as He has revealed Himself in creation. Humanity should know there is a God because there has to be a first cause, a creator. Humanity should also recognize the power of the creator. To create anything as large as the earth—and beyond that the heavens—requires unfathomable power. Everyone should readily recognize that there must be a creator who is infinitely powerful and wise (Ps. 19:1–4). He must be far above humanity.

Knowing about God does not, by itself, save anyone. The Bible teaches that there is *no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved* (Acts 4:12). Those who do not believe in Christ are condemned because they have *not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God* (John 3:18). Salvation depends upon knowing and trusting in Jesus Christ. Special revelation (the Word of God and its teaching on the Savior) is necessary for the lost to know and trust Christ. And as we will see, it is sufficient.

Another reason for God's wrath is that people have a knowledge of God but do not respond properly to it (Rom. 1:21–25). When people reject the light of natural revelation of God, in effect they say that the revelation is false. They then become *vain in their imaginations* (1:21), meaning their reasoning becomes futile. Their hearts become darkened so that they reject God (Eph. 4:18). They become fools (Rom. 1:22), thinking their understanding of life is right. As fools they descend into idolatry, worshiping what God created instead of God (1:23, 25).

The key words in verse 24 are *God also gave them up*. This action does not contradict God's mercy and love. But if people set themselves on a certain course and will not turn from it, God allows them to go that way and suffer the consequences. If people abandon God, they abandon their only hope.

Romans 1:26–32 describes the downward spiral of those who reject God. They end up as one with a *reprobate mind* (1:28) who is unable to discern the difference between right and wrong. After the mind has been distorted, the body becomes debased too (1:29–31).

READ: Romans 1:29–31. **ASK:** What is your impression when you read this list? Are you surprised by some of the sins listed as being part of humanity's abandonment of God? Explain. (Q4)

Paul's description of humanity is rather grim. It is a wonder anyone ever responds to the gospel. Yet that is the beautiful turn in the story of God's love. Humanity is lost and without any desire or power to come to God for salvation. But God's Word brings the power to change their hearts and minds so they might see their need for a Savior and respond. That is amazing, transforming power!

ASK: Have you ever thought that someone was so lost in his sins that there was no way he would ever respond to the gospel? Explain. (Q5)

B. The Word's powerfulness

We need to back up in Romans 1 to catch Paul's introduction to his extended

statement on humanity's lostness. He began his statement with a simple declaration of the gospel's power. Paul wrote that the gospel is *the power of God unto salvation* (1:16).

The Bible is at its core the story of the unfolding of the gospel. To consider the power of the gospel, then, is to consider the power of the Word of God. As the gospel is shared from God's Word, God exercises its power to save those who are powerless to save themselves. God's power is effective for everyone who believes in His Son for salvation (1:16).

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, because it worked! The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Paul himself was Exhibit A. No doubt, people considered him an impossible case. Even the Christians found it hard to believe that Saul of Tarsus, the persecutor and ruthless killer, was converted (Acts 9:26). But the mighty gospel of God had transformed his life, and he knew it would do the same for others. Paul maintained that confident belief to the end of his life. His ministry brought him shame in the world's eyes, but he was never ashamed of the gospel.

In this powerful gospel, *the righteousness of God* is revealed (1:17). Righteousness is being right and doing right by God's standards. To be righteous is to be upright, just. The condition for receiving this righteousness is faith. The phrase *from faith to faith* is a little difficult to interpret. While salvation comes by faith, faith is also a progressive principle and the just lives by his faith (Gal. 2:20). Living by faith leads to the *more abundant* life. From first to last, the Christian life is a matter of faith on our part! And from beginning to end the power of the Word of God plays a vital role.

II. The Power of God for Sanctification

A. The Word as discerner

God's Word is essential for believers who want to grow in the Lord. Spiritual growth cannot happen apart from God's Word.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel fell into unfaithfulness because they acted on the basis of their feelings rather than by faith. God had given them His clear word that they were to enter Canaan. He asked them to trust Him, obey His instructions, and enter His promised rest. Instead of following God's word, the Israelites followed their own fears and doubts. Rather than grasping the challenge in the light of God's promises, they avoided the challenge because it seemed too great for them (Num. 14:1-4). Israel's mistake came in replacing God's fixed standard of His word with the flawed standard of their perspectives and feelings. Only God's truthful Word can give His people a reliable guide for life.

In Hebrews 4:12 the writer described the Word of God. It is *quick*, or *alive*. It is *powerful*, unlike the timid fear of people. It is more incisive than any sword designed by men, because it can penetrate into even the deepest parts of a person's immaterial life. God's Word critiques even the most hidden thoughts and intentions that people have. It can expose all pretenses, excuses, and inconsistencies.

READ: Hebrews 4:12, 13. **ASK:** How do these two verses demonstrate the unity between the Word of God and the person of God? (Q6) Verse 12 describes how deeply the written Word of God examines us, and verse 13 describes how thoroughly the

person of God examines us. Also, verse 12 nearly personifies the written Word, calling it living, powerful, and discerning. God and His Word form one voice.

Even Christians can deceive themselves into disobeying God's Word. They may rationalize their sinful choices, but they cannot fool God. No one can avoid His searching gaze (4:13). God is a light that illumines every action, desire, and motive. When excuses for disobedience are examined in the light of God and His Word, they always prove to be foolish.

ASK: *What rationalizations might some people give for their sins? (Q7) I can't help it. It's just my personality. It's not a big deal. No one knows about it. I only do it every now and then.*

God judges all of life by the fixed standard of His truth in His Word. No circumstances can justify disobedience. No fear will make sin acceptable to Him. The holy God has spoken in His Word, and He demands that people live by it if they are to enjoy His blessing.

Some people are ignorant of what God has said. Others, such as most of the Israelites and some who profess to be Christians, have learned God's Word, but they do not respond to it with faith. In both cases, God's Word is the standard for human behavior. Only those people who learn what God has said and do what He desires can enjoy the blessing of fellowship with Him. God's Word is His essential instruction for human beings. It shows us both where we are wrong and what is right (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

B. The Word as defender

While the Bible exposes our sins and shines the light on God's standard of holiness, it also provides us with victory over temptations to violate that standard. The Word is vital for victorious Christian living.

1. Jesus' pattern

Jesus provides us with an example of the connection between God's Word and victory over temptation.

Near the start of His earthly ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray. His meat was the will of God (John 4:34), and the living water of the Holy Spirit's presence in His prayer life sustained Him and prepared Him for the contest with Satan. After forty days, Satan showed up to tempt Him. Of course Jesus could have just looked at Satan to make him turn around and run away in fear. But Jesus faced the temptations, using God's Word as His tool.

Going without food for forty days takes an incredible amount of strength and fortitude. The normal human response to such prolonged food deprivation is severe weight loss, pain, extreme listlessness, and confusion. So Satan started with offering Jesus food. In response Jesus directly addressed the real issue: *It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3). What God says is more important than what Satan says and more important than what our own needs and desires tell us. God's will should always determine the choices we make.

Did Jesus have a right to have bread? After all, He had sacrificed His physical needs for forty days and nights in devoting Himself to God. Wasn't it time to meet

His body's nutritional needs again? Hunger in the will of God should never be satisfied out of His will. Hunger, or need, within God's will is better than bread, or satisfaction, out of the will of God. Jesus Christ refused to satisfy His physical need for food outside the will of God. Had He yielded to that temptation, He would have disqualified Himself from being the Savior of the world. Of course that was never a possibility. Jesus couldn't sin because He is the perfect Son of God.

ASK: Satan attacks humanity using the lust of the flesh. What is the universal record for all humanity in facing temptations that appeal to the lust of the flesh? (Q8) All have failed at some point.

Jesus faced Satan with the Word of God as His only weapon, and Satan lost the first round in the battle to break the Son's loyalty to the Father.

Having failed in his first attempt to entice Jesus away from His program of ministry, Satan shifted his attack to something more precious to Jesus than the satisfaction of physical needs. Satan took Him from the desert to the holy city and its glorious temple, the heart of worship and service to God and the highest point in the city. Acknowledging that Jesus is the Son of God and therefore in a special relationship to God, Satan urged Him to throw Himself down from that dizzy height in a demonstration of His trust in God (Matt. 4:5, 6). It was a subtle, clever suggestion, underlined with a passage of Scripture. Jesus had used the Old Testament, and Satan began to argue from the same basis.

Satan's second test of Christ probed His confidence in God: *Cast Yourself down; You're the Son of God. It will be a miraculous display of Your relationship to the Father as we see God take care of You.* The Jews expected the Messiah to come in a spectacular way: *The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple* (Mal. 3:1). Here was an opportunity for Jesus to announce the beginning of His ministry in a dramatic way and thereby gain the attention and support of the leaders of the temple and the city. But daring God by putting oneself deliberately in danger is not trusting God. We do not invite trouble just to claim God's protection.

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, saying, *It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt [test] the Lord thy God* (Matt. 4:7). He emphasized that Scripture is more than occasional texts. God's words are not to be used out of context to support someone's desires. Jesus did not need a miracle to prove that He had confidence in God.

ASK: Satan seemed to be looking out for Jesus by giving Him an opportunity to get ahead. Satan does the same to us. Why is that wily tactic so effective? (Q9) Because the end seems positive. We use the end to justify the means.

The vision of a worldwide network of lands and people in a unified government has been the goal of a number of ambitious leaders. Jesus of Nazareth, descendant of King David, would be eligible to assume the throne of a united Israel and restore the nation's ancient glory. Satan supposed that having that position, plus making Israel the head of all the nations and ruling them, would appeal to Jesus. Showing Christ all these kingdoms, he made to Jesus the grandiose offer of all the kingdoms of the world if He would just acknowledge Satan as an object of worship (4:8, 9). Satan was offering a compromise; the kingdoms came with a price tag: Satan would retain his position, and Jesus would worship him. He could

have the kingdoms without the cross. But no one can serve two masters (6:24), and we must worship the one we serve.

Satan's offer provided immediate authority over kingdoms, but Psalm 2 draws a more accurate picture of the prospect for world leadership. God has promised the uttermost parts of the earth for the Son's possession. The psalm advises the kings and judges to serve the Lord with fear: *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way* (Ps. 2:12). Jesus answered, *It is written* and then ordered Satan to leave. The Devil left for a season, defeated but not destroyed.

Jesus' victory over temptation was dependent on the Word of God. He quoted Scripture because it has power that ordinary sayings or truisms don't have. In a real sense, God's Word was a sword in the Son of God's hand. The apostle Paul actually calls the Word of God a *sword*, and adds that the Holy Spirit is the One Who wields it with precision and power.

2. The Spirit's precision

In His letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle Paul used armor as a metaphor for the believer's defense against Satan's wily ways (Eph. 6:10–17).

The *helmet of salvation* is the last defensive piece of armor Paul mentioned (6:17). Since he was addressing Christians, he did not use the word *salvation* in the sense of the saving of one's soul. By *salvation*, he meant present deliverance from the power of Satan and sin. Just as a helmet protects a soldier's head, so the helmet of salvation protects the mind from the destructive philosophies and attitudes that Satan launches at us.

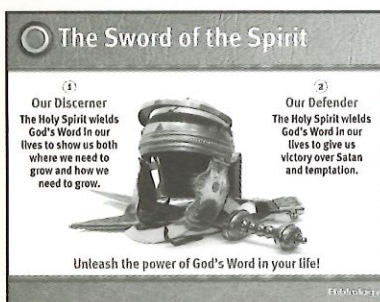
READ: Romans 12:1, 2. **ASK:** What is the connection between right thinking and right living? (Q10) *Right living comes out of right thinking. You can't change your life without changing your thinking.*

READ: Ephesians 4:21. **ASK:** Paul took time to teach the Ephesians. How did Paul summarize what he taught them? (Q11) *The truth is in Jesus.*

Our fight against Satan and the hosts of evil includes offensive strategy as well as defensive strategy. We must invade his territory. Paul described our offensive weapon as *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (6:17). The Christian's sword is the Bible. We must become so well acquainted with Scripture that we can draw upon just the right verse at the right time to ward off an attack by the Devil.

A Roman soldier used his sword to parry a blow from an opponent's sword and to strike a blow at the enemy. The Christian's sword is the *sword of the Spirit* because it is the Holy Spirit Who inspired the Bible and uses God's Word to accomplish God's purposes in our lives. When we attempt to invade Satan's territory, we must be well armed with Scripture. It is God's help to us in living victorious over temptation for the glory of God.

RESOURCE: Display resource 10 to summarize the power of God's Word in our lives.



MAKING IT PERSONAL

Recognize the Power

ASK: What will characterize our use of God's Word once we recognize its power to discern and defend? (Q12) *We will take it seriously, consult it often, memorize it regularly, and share it generously.*

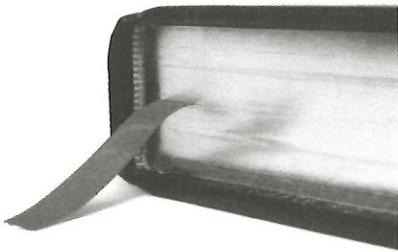
ASK: How have you treated God's Word: as a regular book or as a powerful weapon? (Q13)

Unleash the Power

ASK: What will you do to unleash the power of the Bible in your life? (Q14)

ASK: How might our church unleash the power of the Bible in our ministries? (Q15)

Old Testament Books



Topic

Survey of the Old Testament

Theme

God inspired each book of the Old Testament with purpose and for our benefit.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will consider which Bible books he will purpose to read and study over the next year.

Materials

- Resource 11

Scripture Focus

Various Bible passages

Summary

This lesson provides a brief summary of each book of the Old Testament. Each one has a message designed by God and worthy of our attention and study.

Outline

- I. The Books of the Law
- II. The Books of History
- III. The Books of Poetry
- IV. The Books of Prophecy
 - A. Major Prophets
 - B. Minor Prophets

Memory Verse

*"Now all these things happened unto them for examples:
and they are written for our admonition,
upon whom the ends of the world are come"
(1 Corinthians 10:11).*