

Adult Bible Study in Simplified English

Teaching Guide



Profiles in Character

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Introduction for Teachers

The purpose of this teaching guide is to provide teachers with a plan for teaching a quality Bible lesson while helping participants improve their English language skills. Use of this material is suggested for International Sunday School classes or any Bible study group taught at a Basic English level.

The Teaching Guide begins with listings of the Lesson Focus, Focal/Background Text, and Memory Verse, all of which provide the premise for the lesson. This information is followed by a teaching plan under headings of Connect with Life, Guide the Study, and Encourage Application. At the end of each lesson, Supplemental Teaching Ideas are provided under those same headings. As the teacher, you may pick and choose from these helps to use along with the student's Study Guide to fit the lesson to your class members' abilities and needs.

The Bible text printed in the lesson material is from the NEW LIFE Version of the Bible (NLV), an inexpensive translation (not a paraphrase) which uses only an 850-word vocabulary. The NLV is available from Christian Literature International, P. O. Box 777, Canby, Oregon 97013; e-mail christian@canby.com; telephone (orders only) 1-800-324-9734.

The NLV Bible often uses simplified phrases to express terms generally familiar to anyone raised in a Christian environment. In the Teaching Guide, these terms will usually be expressed using the NLV terminology, followed by the more common term in parentheses; for example, "proud religious lawkeeper (Pharisee)" or "early preacher (prophet)." The teacher has the option of using the NLV term for new Christians or beginning students, or the common term where it will be better understood and less cumbersome in teaching. Once a word or phrase has been introduced in the Word List or teaching procedures, however, the familiar expression may be used to help students add it to their vocabulary.

Prayer is sometimes specifically suggested in the teaching procedures. It should be an integral part of your lesson plan. Use your own judgment as to where it best fits into the teaching session.

The writers and editors wish you success and give you prayerful support in your teaching of this Adult Bible Study in Simplified English.

Adult Bible Study in Simplified English is published by the Baptist General Convention of Texas and follows the same curriculum plan as the Bible Study for Texas materials, but has no Texas emphasis. Teachers may wish to purchase Bible Study for Texas lesson comments and teaching guides as additional resources. These may be ordered through your church or directly from the Sunday School/Discipleship Division, Baptist General Convention of Texas, 333 North Washington, Dallas, TX 75246-1798, e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org; or toll-free telephone 1-866-249-1799.

About the Writer

Margaret Gayle served with her husband, Jim, as a missionary in Vietnam and Indonesia for more than 24 years. She taught ESL at University of North Texas in Denton and at Tarrant County College for eight years. Margaret is a native Texan and lives in Plano. She and her husband have three adult sons and ten grandchildren. They are members of First Chinese Baptist Church of Dallas. They presently work through the church with international students at UTD and SMU.

Suggestions for Teaching

General Suggestions for Teaching Simplified English Audiences

1. Provide language edition Bibles so students can read the focal passage in their native languages.
2. Beginning students may require three sessions to complete one lesson.
3. Review the Word List before beginning the study. Provide Study Guide pages for class to keep vocabulary studies in their notebooks.
4. Prepare 9-12 core sentences which tell the most important part of the Bible focal text. Illustrate each sentence with stick figures and symbols in *picture sequence* form (see details below).
5. Prepare lesson outlines or written materials before class—make your own cling sheets by cutting apart white plastic garbage bags and writing on them with markers. The plastic bags will cling to the wall.

Bible Comments/Focal Text

1. Help students hear English and practice their pronunciation by modeling phrases and sentence. Allow the entire class to repeat. Be consistent with stress and intonation. Speak naturally.
2. Allow individual students to read a sentence or paragraph at a time. For further practice, ask students to tell sections from Bible comments in their own words.
3. When time allows, pairs may read the lesson again to each other.
4. Class may close books and listen as a native speaker reads the section again.
5. Discuss lesson using “Things to Think About.”

Memory Verse

1. Challenge class members to say the Memory Verse several times each day.
2. Provide blank paper for students to write Memory Verses.
3. Write phrases or individual words on separate pieces of paper. Give to students to place in order.
4. Write entire verse on board. Read in unison. Erase key words a few at a time. Recite until entire verse is erased and class can repeat by memory.
5. Make a symbol for each word or phrase of the verse.

6. Use the symbols as a reminder for saying the verse.

Picture Sequencing (Lipson Method)

This method is especially suited for teaching beginners. It consists of a series of pictures with accompanying sentences that tell a story. It may be used solely for oral production (using pictures alone) or for integrated skills (engaging students in reading and writing the story).

You may use real pictures, videotape, pictures that are professionally drawn, or stick figures

Other benefits include the following:

1. Relaxed, low-anxiety atmosphere as students focus on the pictures and create their own sentences to tell the story

Focus on fluency, not just accuracy

Focus on a message or task rather than form or grammar

Minimal error-correction as students tell the story

2. Pictures (even stick figures) convey meaning in every language.
3. The same set of pictures can be used with more than one level of students by making the sentences easier or more difficult.
4. The use of pictures helps students learn the language in “chunks” rather than words in isolation.
5. The only item needed is a piece of chalk—or a marker, if using a cling sheet or overhead transparency.

Preparation

1. Put a story into sentences that are suitable for the level of your students. Try to tell the story with a maximum of ten sentences. For low beginners, choose the simplest and fewest words possible. Keep sentences in their most basic form, so students can combine sentences later.

2. Draw simple pictures or stick figures to illustrate key points in the story. These serve as prompts for the telling of the story. Other drawing tips:

An “x” in a small square beside a picture enables you to cue for a negative as you tell the story.

Direct quotations may be indicated with a cartoon-type bubble.

Suggestions for Teaching

Procedure

1. Introduce the story by following your prepared script of sentences (for consistency) and pointing to the pictures as you speak. This will give students the main idea and help them think in chunks of language (as in real-life language use).
2. Introduce the new words as you again reference the pictures. Use props and/or dramatization as needed to establish understanding. Work on individual sounds and word stress as students repeat new words.
3. Lead students in repetition of the story, one sentence at a time, working on sentence stress and intonation.
4. Lead the class in one more repetition of the story (going straight through and continuing to refer to the pictures throughout the story).
5. Ask the class to tell you the story as you cue the story sequence by pointing to the pictures. (You become "stage prompter" at this point.)
6. Then ask for a single volunteer to tell the story. (This may open the door for several more proficient students to use what they know.)
7. Divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students to give each person practice in telling the story. (Inevitably, the most eager student will go first, followed by another "semi"-eager student. By the time it is the least proficient student's turn, he/she will have learned a lot by listening, will have observed a good model at least a couple of times, and will have bolstered courage for risk-taking.)
8. Follow with questions to review story (begin by naming the setting, the characters, etc.—easy questions).
9. Conclude with life application questions that require some thought and give students opportunity to express opinion, emotion, and their own ideas.

Lesson Expansion

If the setting and circumstances permit, use these ideas:

- Sequencing pictures (a set for each pair of students) while listening to you or to a taped voice tell the story
- Picture sequencing without hearing the story told
- Matching pictures and sentences
- Scrambled sentences to arrange in order (writing numbers or letters in front of sentences to show sequence; cutting up sentences and moving around to position correct order)

- Strip story (cutting up sentences, issuing one strip per student, asking students to arrange themselves in order, having them retell the story by contributing the portion on their paper strip)
- Cloze (supplying a written copy with every nth word blank; students work in pairs to fill in the missing words)
- Dictation (teacher or student telling the story while students write what they hear)
- Provide a copy of the sentences for each student. Ask that they read the story to a partner.
- Ask students to write the story in their own words.

Bible passage as content for reading

Procedure

1. Tell the parable or story using pictures. Use animation and simple sentences.
2. Ask questions about the main idea of the story.
3. Read story aloud while students follow along and underline unknown words. Go over the meaning of these words with the whole class.
4. Intermediate or advanced students: Have students read silently a second time to look for answers to two or three questions about details that you have written on the board. Ask students to discuss their answers with a partner. Then go over answers with the whole class.
5. Beginning or low-intermediate students: Read story again and ask students to repeat it with you line by line.
6. Invite the class to read the story with you in unison.
7. Ask pairs to read the story to each other.
8. Ask for volunteers to tell the story in their own words.
9. Make drawings large enough for the back row to see.
10. Select a list of new words in the story—unfamiliar words that the students would not likely be able to figure out from context (generally 8-10 new words per lesson).
11. List the new words in categories: verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs. When listing verbs, you may write both simple present and past tense forms (e.g., eat/ate, walk/walked). Basic beginners would do well to tell the story in present tense, but high beginners could work in present tense, then retell the story in past tense.

Suggestions for Teaching

Checklist for Successful Classrooms

Right Kind of Input

1. New language in every lesson
2. Input that is slightly above the students' current level of proficiency
3. Content relevant to the students' real-life needs and interests
4. Language learned in meaningful chunks, not words in isolation
5. Comprehensibility achieved by use of the following:
 - Realia or authentic materials
 - Simplified language (rephrasing, repeating, clear enunciation)
 - Demonstration and multiple examples rather than explanation
 - Lots of gestures and nonverbal language

Low Anxiety Environment

Students should not be afraid to make mistakes or take risks in language learning. The following factors contribute to a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere and build a sense of community:

- Personally greeting and bidding farewell to students
- Sincere and frequent affirmation
- Minimal error correction from the teacher
- Frequent reference to the culture(s) of the students
- Smiles and laughter that are commonplace
- Connecting with students through eye contact and positioning yourself on students' eye level
- Calling students by name

Checklist for Real-Life Interaction

1. Pace activities with a balance of noisy/quiet and still/active
2. Attention to different learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic)
3. Variety in grouping (predominately pairs and small groups of three or five; using whole class in initial presentation and again for feedback and wrap-up at the end)
4. A focus on a task or message rather than form (grammar)
5. Provision for all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
6. Avoidance of questions for which answers are known
7. Use of information gap activity in which partners

- have different pieces of information and must ask each other questions in order to fill in their gaps of understanding
8. Other useful activities: surveys, interviews, role-play, problem-solving, and interactive games
 9. Review previous material.

Some suggestions based on material developed for the EFL Training Manual—Beyond our Borders.

Online Resources and Study Helps

- **EasyEnglish** is a form of simple English developed by Wycliffe Associates (UK). Their website: (www.easyenglish.info) contains Bible commentaries, Bible translations, Bible studies, and other materials written in simple English. They are free for you to download and use.
- Use the following free helps: Additional adult Bible study comments by Dr. Jim Denison, “Teaching Plans,” and “Teaching Resource Items” available for each lesson online at www.baptistwaypress.org.
- Additional teaching help is provided in the Internet edition of the Baptist Standard www.baptiststandard.com. Go to the website, then to Departments, then Bible Study.

Overview Chart

Profiles in Character

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----------------------------|
| Lesson 1 | Women at Moses' Birth: Taking Action to Help Children | Exodus 1:15 to 2:10 |
| Lesson 2 | Moses: Seeking Good for Undeserving People | Exodus 32:7-14, 30-34 |
| Lesson 3 | Caleb: Showing Courageous Faith | Numbers 13:25 to 14:10a |
| Lesson 4 | The Sisters: Challenging Unfairness | Numbers 27:1-11 |
| Lesson 5 | Joshua: Leading by Following God | Joshua 24:1-3a, 13-27 |
| Lesson 6 | Deborah: Exercising Strong Leadership | Judges 4:1-16; 5:1-7 |
| Lesson 7 | Samuel: Being Faithful to the Highest Allegiance | 1 Samuel 12:1-5, 13-25 |
| Lesson 8 | David and Nathan: Accepting Personal Responsibility for Sin | 2 Samuel 11:2-15; 12:1-13a |
| Lesson 9 | Amos: Facing Opposition Courageously | Amos 1:1-2; 2:6-16; 7:10-17 |
| Lesson 10 | Micaiah: Telling the Truth | 1 Kings 22:6-28 |
| Lesson 11 | Huldah: Interpreting and Proclaiming God's Message | 2 Chronicles 34:19-31 |
| Lesson 12 | Jeremiah: Being Faithful in the Depths of Despair | Jeremiah 20:7-18; 26:1-15 |
| Lesson 13 | Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Giving Unlimited Devotion to God | Daniel 3 |
| Lesson 14 | Esther: Taking the Ultimate Risk | Esther 4:1-16 |
| Lesson 15 | Nehemiah: Standing Up for People | Nehemiah 2:1-5, 5:1-15 |

Teaching Guide

Lesson 1: Women at Moses' Birth: Taking Action to Help Children

Lesson Focus

Women acted boldly and courageously to overcome the Pharaoh's evil plans, and by doing so, helped children, including a special child.

Focal Text

Exodus 1:15 to 2:10

Memory Verse

"Through faith we understand that the world was made by the Word of God. Things we see were made through what could not be seen." (Hebrews 11:3)

Connect with Life

1. On the marker board, write the three proverbs quoted in the Lesson 1 introduction. Explain that a proverb is a saying that holds a well-known truth. Read the proverbs to the class.

—"It takes a whole village to raise a child." (A Nigerian proverb)

—"A child does not grow up in a single home."

—"A child does not belong to one parent or one home."

Ask class members to tell similar proverbs they may know from various cultures.

2. Invite members to consider the truth of these proverbs in their own lives. Ask question #3 from Things to Think About in the Study Guide (page 9): *What are the names of some adults who helped you become the person that you are today?* Allow a time for reflection and sharing.

3. Introduce the *Profiles in Character* studies by pointing out that in each lesson we will study a person from the Old Testament in chronological order, learning about them and from them. Present the Overview Chart (Teaching Guide, page 6; Study Guide, page 3) by distributing it to everyone or by preparing poster on the wall to refer to over the next few months.

Explain what the word *character* means in this study. (moral excellence, making consistently good choices, etc.) Use a dictionary to look up the word and lead the class to discuss some of the other ways this word is used in English (a character in a play; a person who is "quite a character"; the alphabet has 26 characters, etc.).

4. Transition to the topic of this lesson by stating the women at Moses' birth showed the character traits of kindness, courage, and compassion by taking action to help the Hebrew children.

Say: *Children cannot survive without the loving care of adults. In the story of Moses' birth, we meet five women who acted boldly and courageously to help a child. These women provide a model for how we also can reach out to a child in need.*

Guide the Study

5. Enlist a member to read Exodus 1:15-22 aloud while the class listens for actions that were taken to save a helpless child. Discuss the passage with these questions: —*What would the command to kill the boy babies and save the girl babies eventually result in?* (that generation would have fewer Hebrew men; the abundance of Hebrew females might become slave-wives of Egyptian masters)

—*How does the action of the two nurses show they had a higher command than the command given by Pharaoh?*

—*When called to give an account of their actions, what "creative answers" did the nurses give?* (The Hebrew women, unlike the Egyptian women, were strong and gave birth fast.)

—*What good came to the nurses and the Hebrews because of the courage of the nurses?* (The nurses were given families of their own. The Hebrew people became strong and numerous.)

6. Ask: *What can we learn from these two nurses? If you had been in their situation, would you have had the courage they had?* (Receive responses.)

7. Invite class members to read Exodus 2:1-3 aloud together. Ask: *What two choices did the mother have in this situation?* (to follow Pharaoh's order and throw her son into the Nile river, or to act creatively to save the child's life)

8. Before class, make copies of the statements below; make one set of statements for each member. These statements outline the story in verses 1-3. Cut each copy into strips by sentences and place in small envelopes, one envelope for each member.

During class, distribute the envelopes and request the members to arrange the sentences as they appear in the story. After a time, allow members to self-check by referring to their Bible (or their copy of the Bible text in the Study Guide.

- | |
|--|
| The mother gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. |
| The mother hid the baby for three months. |
| The baby grew and the mother could not hide him any longer. |
| The mother prepared a basket made from grass and covered with tar. |
| The mother put the baby in the basket. |
| The mother set the basket in the grass by the side of the Nile. |

Ask: *How was the courage of the mother an important part of God's plan?*

(An alternate activity: Instead of making individual envelopes for members, ask the class members to look at the verses and compose their own summary statements. Write their statements on the marker board.)

9. Read Exodus 2:4. With the class, brainstorm ways God was at work in this situation to save the life of Moses. (Possible ways: Moses had a loving, older sister; the sister was willing to stay and watch; the sister wanted to know what would happen—to report back to her mother, no doubt.) Ask: *How was the courage of the sister an important part of God's plan?*

10. Read Exodus 2:5-10 to discover how God also used the courage of Pharaoh's daughter to fulfill His purpose for a special child. Divide the class into groups of 2-3 people. Instruct them that you will read out "Do you think...?" questions for them to discuss. Allow a minute or two for each question to be discussed.

Do You Think...?

The Pharaoh's daughter knew that the child was a Hebrew and had been condemned to death.

- Do you think her action could have resulted in her own death?
- Do you think the baby's crying alerted Pharaoh's daughter to the basket in the grass, or did retrieving the basket awaken the baby?
- Do you think Moses' mother planned on an Egyptian discovering the basket with the child inside? If not, what other reason might the mother have had for placing the baby in the basket?
- Do you think the sister was instructed by her mother as to what to say and do, or did she act on her own initiative?
- Do you think it was harder for the mother to place the baby in the basket or to return the child later to Pharaoh's daughter?

11. Explain that Moses was a special child, eventually called by God to lead His people out of Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land. Circle back to the idea contained in the proverbs at the beginning of the lesson. State that it took five women to give Moses a safe life. These women acted with courage, and because they had courage, Moses had life.

Encourage Application

12. Invite class to think of and name the children who are needy in their neighborhood/city. Write the list on a marker board. (underprivileged, ethnic minority, latch-key kids, orphans, single parent or absentee parent kids) Lead members to discuss ways they can act on behalf of these children today. What can they do as individuals? What can they do as a class?

13. Close with a prayer that each member would be an advocate on behalf of children.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas
Connect with Life

◆ Before class, prepare a note card similar to the one below for each member.

*Five women in my childhood
who influenced my life for good:*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Distribute the cards, allow time for reflection and writing, then ask for volunteers to share what the women did that influenced their life.

Encourage Application

◆ Ask: *What ministries have you seen or participated in to help defenseless children?* (Allow for responses. As needed, mention these ministries: Buckner International's child feeding programs in Mexico, the Salvation Army's Soup & Shelter Club, Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child.)

◆ State that only rarely do circumstances arise in which, in order to save a child, we need to defy the government or break the law. In today's lesson, we look at five women who did just that. These women helped save both a generation of children and one special child.

Teaching Guide

Lesson 2: Moses: Seeking Good for Undeserving People

Lesson Focus

Moses interceded with God for the good of the people even though they did not deserve it.

Focal Text

Exodus 32:7-14, 30-34

Memory Verse

“But I show loving-kindness to thousands of those who love Me and keep My Laws.” (Exodus 20:6)

Connect with Life

1. Invite the class to think of the longest trip they have ever made with a group. Was it a long plane ride, a hike over mountainous terrain, a bus trip across miles of inland, an ocean voyage? Was it with children, a travel group, a military unit?

Ask: What often happens to camaraderie and feelings of goodwill as a trip wears on? What causes people of the group to begin grumbling? What or who is needed to pacify the demands of the group?

2. Connect today’s lesson with last week’s lesson by saying: *In today’s lesson, we study the character of Moses, the young child who grew up in the palace of Pharaoh, but he left his life of ease as an adult. He later led the people of Israel out of slavery into the land God had promised them. The trip to the Promised Land was long and difficult, and the people were not happy. Along the way, the people disobeyed God’s laws. Moses, as a noble leader, interceded to God for the people, even though they deserved punishment.*

Guide the Study

3. Explain that Moses went up on Mount Sinai to meet with God, leaving the people under his brother Aaron’s supervision. When Moses was delayed on the mountain, the people were disobedient to God’s command to “have no other gods but Me.” He made a golden calf to worship. Moses was angry when he saw the image.

4. Invite someone to read Exodus 32:7-10 aloud while the class listens for how God expressed His anger and His intent to destroy. Invite another member to read

verses 11-14 aloud while the class notes arguments Moses made to the Lord about why He should change His mind.

5. Ask: *Knowing God’s command not to make images/ idols, why do you think the Israelites acted as they did? How would you expect God to respond? Why? How would you expect Moses to respond?* (Invite responses.)

6. Ask: *What do you find surprising in these verses?* (Possible responses: In verse 7, God saying “your people” instead of “My people,” in verse 9, God calling the people “strong-willed,” in verse 10, the extent of God’s anger against the people)

Emphasize that God is a God of love and forgiveness. The Israelites had blatantly disobeyed God’s command. The Bible teaches that there are always consequences for sinful actions.

7. Refer to verses 11b–13. Ask the class to give the four arguments Moses made in intercession to God. Jot the points on a marker board.

- Israel was God’s people.
- God had delivered the people with great power and a strong hand. (So why give up on them now?)
- The Egyptians would mock God.
- God had promised to make the people numerous and give them a land.

Follow by asking: *What do these arguments reveal about Moses’ character?* Point out that it was the intercession of Moses that led to God’s change of mind.

8. Invite someone to read Exodus 32:30-34 aloud while the class listens for Moses’ second intercession.

Ask: Why do you think Moses was willing to intercede for the people? What do you think about Moses’ request in verse 32? (Forgive their sin, or if not, take my name out of Your book...) Receive responses.

Encourage Application

9. Comment: *It is extremely difficult to forgive and intercede for people who don’t deserve to be treated well. But as Christ’s followers, we should do so. Forgiveness is so radical that it sometimes leads people to God’s purpose for their life. Just as Moses interceded*

for the good of the people, we should intercede for sinners—for their good.

10. Encourage members to consider actions they can take to intercede for people they know. Close in prayer that everyone would have concern for undeserving people.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

◆ Tell this true story of Sokreaska Himm, as summarized below, and using the photos at right as illustration. For a fuller story, search the Internet to find out details on his life journey of tragedy, salvation, and forgiveness. (Suggested site: www.hampsteadgardenscofc.org.au/Reaksa.pdf)

Dr. Sokreaska Himm survived the brutal killing of his family in Cambodia during the reign of the Khmer Rouge. He later escaped to the U.S. and overcame his bitterness and hatred to become a follower of Jesus Christ. Dr. Himm believed he should forgive the killers and pray for their salvation. So he returned to Cambodia to offer the men—who didn't deserve it—forgiveness. He continued to pray for the two surviving killers, one of whom became a believer. Dr. Himm continues to intercede for all the perpetrators of evil against his people.

Comment that one of the most difficult acts to perform is to intercede for a person who is clearly in the wrong. The victim of a terrible crime who expresses concern for the family of the criminal demonstrates true character.

Lead the class to discuss what is involved in intercession. (honesty, admitting one's own wrong, valuing the perpetrator, understanding God's love for every person, etc.)

Encourage Application

◆ Have the class compare the story of Dr. Himm's intercession for the people who killed his family with Moses' intercession for the Israelites who disobeyed God.

Ask: *Why is it hard to intercede for people who have done great wrong? What part does faith have to do with interceding for people who have sinned?*

◆ Lead the members to say the Memory Verse together. Close in prayer that each person would have a heart of loving-kindness toward people who do wrong.



*Photos of Dr. Sokreaska Himm, his wife, and children.
(www.hampsteadgardenscofc.org.au/gallery.htm)*

Teaching Guide

Lesson 3: Caleb: Showing Courageous Faith

Lesson Focus

Caleb stood firmly for God’s way even though his stand put him in conflict with most of the people.

Focal Text

Numbers 13:25 to 14:10a

Memory Verse

“All these many people who have faith in God are around us like a cloud. Let us put every thing out of our lives that keep us from doing what we should. Let us keep running the race that God has planned for us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

Connect with Life

1. Give this brief synopsis of the 1957 American film, *12 Angry Men*. (If possible, have a display copy of the DVD in your classroom. It can be found at many public libraries. Or copy and enlarge the original movie poster image on the next page to provide a visual.)

The movie tells the story of a jury made up of 12 men as they deliberate the guilt or innocence of a teenage Hispanic boy who had been tried for the murder of his father. It appears to be an open-and-shut case, meaning that a guilty verdict is a sure thing. Eleven jurors immediately vote guilty; only Juror #8 casts a vote of not guilty. As the deliberations unfold, this juror convinces the other jurors that a not-guilty verdict might be appropriate.

2. Explain that the movie *12 Angry Men* explores the difficulties encountered in decision-making in a group of people with different personalities and perspectives. State that today’s lesson focuses on Caleb, a man who had the courage to stand firmly for God’s way even though his stand put him in conflict with most of the other people.

Guide the Study

3. Give this brief introduction: *After leaving Egypt, God’s people wandered in the wilderness until arriving near the land God had promised Moses. God instructed Moses to choose 12 leaders to go into and scout the land. Today’s lesson focuses on the report these 12 leaders brought back to Moses and the people.*

4. Divide the class into two listening teams, one listening for the good report and the other listening for the bad report. Enlist someone to read aloud Numbers 13:25-33. Write two headings on a marker board: “Good Report” and “Bad Report.” Invite volunteers from the two groups to share alternately what they found.

5. Point out that the ten spies who opposed and the two spies who favored going into the land saw the same thing but responded differently.

Ask: *Which report influenced most of the people?* (The negative report) Lead the class to explore reasons people are often more easily influenced by negative reports. (Possible reasons: Lack of faith in God’s power, fear, low self-esteem, etc.)

6. Invite a member to read Numbers 14:5-10a aloud.

Ask the group to respond to these questions:
—*What positive encouragement did Joshua and Caleb give concerning the land?* (It is a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey.)

—*What positive encouragement did they give concerning the Lord?* (The Lord is with us.)

—*What positive encouragement did they give concerning the people in the land?* (The people will be as food for us, and they have no way to escape.)

7. Explore with the class the reasons for the people’s threatening opposition to Joshua and Caleb’s positive picture of the possibilities of taking the land. (Possible reasons: Lack of faith, weariness from wilderness travel, a wrong view of Joshua and Caleb’s optimism, etc.)

Encourage Application

8. Comment: *Each of us may face a time in our life when we will need courage to take a godly position about a matter. If we have a strong relationship with the Lord, we will be prepared to influence others for good.*

Explain that Caleb had to stay with the Israelites during their wilderness experience, but God blessed him and his family in the end.

9. Refer to the Study Guide’s “Things to Think About” and focus on #1: *How can you best respond when you know God has a difficult task for you?*

Discuss ways we can respond when we know

God has a difficult task for us. Lead the class in prayer that everyone will respond with courage as Caleb did.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

♦ Ask: *Has there ever been a time in your life when you had to take a stand against a wrong or injustice? How did you handle the situation? Were you able to influence those who held the opposite viewpoint by your appeals?* (Allow a moment for reflection and sharing. If you have a personal example, share it with the class.)

Say: *As followers of Christ, it takes courage to stand up and speak out against an injustice or a wrong decision. Caleb, the Bible character we study today, was a courageous follower of God. He was willing to stand for God and follow His leading even though the majority of the Hebrew nation opposed him.*

Encourage Application

♦ Lead the class to discuss challenges we as Christians face that require courage. Allow time for sharing, then refer to the Study Guide's "Things to Think About," #3: *How can "the land of milk and honey" have meaning to you?*

Ask the group to consider the "land flowing with milk and honey" that God might want to lead each class member toward. *What opposition might they face?*

Call for a moment of reflection: *Will I have the courage of Caleb to stand against the opposition and "go up at once and take the land"?*

Close with a prayer of surrender to follow the Lord and do His work even in face of opposition.



Original movie poster for 12 Angry Men

Teaching Guide

Lesson 4: The Sisters: Challenging Unfairness

Lesson Focus

The sisters challenged the unfair laws and customs that prevented women from inheriting land.

Focal Text

Numbers 27:1-11

Memory Verse

“Wait on the Lord. Keep His way. And He will give you a high place to receive the land. When the sinful are cut off, you will see it.” (Psalm 37:34)

Connect with Life

1. Write the word *Discrimination* in large letters on a marker board. Beneath this word, list the words *sex/gender*, *racial*.

| | |
|---|--------|
| DISCRIMINATION | |
| Sex/Gender | Racial |
| <i>(add other examples of discrimination based on class discussion)</i> | |

Discuss the definition for *discrimination* from the Study Guide, pointing out that discrimination is always one group of people unfairly treating another group of people.

Ask the class to think of other groups who could be added to the list—handicapped, deaf, blind, elderly, mixed race, unattractive, and in some cases, Christians (or other religious groups).

2. State that today’s study is about five brave women who exercised wisdom in challenging a tradition that affected them personally. We will look at what happened, and then consider how we can act with wisdom to eliminate injustice in our world today.

Guide the Study

3. Tell that the five women in today’s study are the daughters of Zelophehad (pronounced zeh-LOH-feh-had).

Prior to class, enlist a class member to be prepared to read aloud Numbers 27:1.

Then give this brief introduction and explanation of Zelophehad and his unique family situation:

Zelophehad was a descendent of Joseph’s oldest son, Manasseh. He had no sons but five daughters. Within ancient Israel, a person’s name continued through the sons. Without a son, the man’s land would pass to another person, possibly a non-family member. This meant that the deceased could not enjoy the blessings of the promise that came through the land because none of his offspring would possess the land. Continuation of one’s name was very important. The daughters of Zelophehad were concerned for their father’s name within Israel’s future heritage.

4. Invite someone to read Numbers 27:2-4 aloud while the class listens for the case the sisters brought to Moses. Display the illustration on the next page as a visual while the sisters’ words are read.

After the reading is complete, ask: *What did the sisters do concerning the injustice they felt? Were their actions appropriate? Why?* (Receive responses. If not mentioned, point out the boldness of their action: They presented their case in a major hearing of Moses and leaders of the people, and they didn’t say “Please.” They said boldly, “Give us land....”)

5. Invite another member to read Numbers 27:5-11 aloud while the class listens for the verdict. Lead the class to state the main points in the passage. Jot responses on a marker board.

- Moses inquired of the Lord.
- The Lord informed Moses that the daughters were correct in their request.
- The Lord told Moses to “be sure” that the inheritance passed to the daughters.
- The Lord implemented a new practice.

6. Lead the class to name the order of inheritance:

- Son
- Daughter
- Brothers
- Uncles
- Nearest family

Add that this practice protected the rights of the deceased’s offspring, particularly the females, and the land was kept within the family of the original owner.

Encourage Application

7. State that life is never entirely without discrimination, but that does not mean we should accept discrimination. Women’s inheritance rights are not the only issue of unfairness in our world today. Personalize today’s study with a discussion of these questions:

—*What kind of injustices would influence you to take action?*

—*What are right ways to fight unfairness?*

—*When is it right to challenge a law?*

—*What unfair situations today do you need to do something about?*

8. Close in prayer, asking God to help us have courage to get involved in challenging injustice in our world today.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

♦ Introduce the lesson with this case study:

In 1975, there was an influx of Vietnamese refugees into the Bryan-College Station area in Texas. To get a driver’s license, they had to pass a written test. Many of these refugees could drive, but they were not able to speak English very well. A missionary living in the area felt it was not fair for the test not to be translated into Vietnamese. He intervened first to the local Department of Public Safety and then to the state headquarters. The State granted permission for the test

to be interpreted into Vietnamese.

Ask: *What did it take for the missionary to take action? (He cared enough. He had courage.)*

State that today’s lesson is about a family of sisters who were affected by an injustice in the way that land was distributed and passed down to the next generation. They made a decision to go against a tradition and seek a change—a change that impacted their lives and the lives of women in future generations.

Encourage Application

♦ Say: *We may not be able to change the whole world, but we can help change the community where we live.*

Lead the class to brainstorm steps we can take to become more aware of discrimination and the actions we can take to build a more just world. Steps might include:

- Pay attention to our community/city and watch for injustices that need correcting.
- Pray and ask God how He can use us to make a difference.
- Pray for both boldness and wisdom to act appropriately.
- Pray that we would have the same passion for justice that God has.

Close in prayer, asking God to lead us to see where we can get involved and to have the wisdom to act boldly and humbly.

Daughters of Zelophehad, as in Numbers 27:1-11, illustration from The Bible and Its Story Taught by One Thousand Picture Lessons. Edited by Charles F. Horne and Julius A. Bewer. 1908, Public Domain



Teaching Guide

Lesson 5: Joshua: Leading by Following God

Lesson Focus

Joshua led his people to follow God faithfully.

Focal Text

Joshua 24:1-3a, 13-27

Memory Verse

“If you think it is wrong to serve the Lord, choose today whom you will serve. ...But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

Connect with Life

1. On a marker board, write the words *Follower* and *Leader*. Present this illustration:

A father was overweight and out of shape, so he decided to change his way of eating and begin an exercise program. He set some goals and began following a routine to achieve his goals. Because he knew the new lifestyle would benefit his family as well, he led his wife and children to join him.

2. Ask: *In this illustration, who followed? Who led? What methods might the father have used to convince his family to join in a different diet and exercise program?* (Responses may include persuading by presenting the benefits from the new program; warning of consequences to physical health if the new program was not followed.)

3. Say: *Today we study the character of Joshua who was both a follower and a leader. The story of Joshua 24, in our Bible lesson today, focuses on Joshua’s challenge to the Israelite people to serve the Lord—and the people’s response to that challenge.*

After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the Israelites had moved into the land God promised. Joshua and Caleb led and fought to conquer the land. Under Joshua’s leadership, with God’s help, in one great victory the walls of Jericho fell and the Israelites were able to take possession of the city. Now Joshua is old. He knew the people could easily be influenced to turn back to worshiping other gods. He reminded them that they had a choice. He urged them to follow the Lord faithfully with their whole heart.

Guide the Study

4. Enlist someone to read Joshua 24:1-3 aloud. Ask: *From these verses, what stands out about Joshua as a leader?* (He called for a group meeting with leaders of the various tribes present; he spoke not just his own words but the words of the Lord to the people.)

5. Enlist another member to read Joshua 24:13-15 aloud while the class listens for ways Joshua inspired the people. As members respond, jot their answers on a marker board. (He reminded them how God had helped and guided them, challenged them to do their best to serve the Lord in faith and truth, urged them to make a firm commitment, and publicly announced his own commitment to follow God.)

6. Assign Joshua 24:16-24 to be read by two groups. Ask one group to read the words of the people and another group to read the words of Joshua. Allow time before reading for each group to scan the passage and note their verses.

7. Lead the class to discuss the passage with these questions:

- What seems to be the main danger for the Israelite people?* (The danger that they would return to worshiping foreign gods.)
- On what basis did the people commit to serving the Lord?* (They had seen how the Lord had powerfully saved them in the past.)
- Why were the people not able to serve the Lord completely? Why are we not able to worship Him completely?* (He is Holy, and we all fall short many times.)
- What would failure to remain faithful to the Lord lead to?* (punishment)
- What was the purpose of writing in the book of the Law and setting up a stone monument?* (Reminders to the people of their commitment.)
- How would these reminders help the people keep their commitment to faithfully serve the Lord?* (They served as witnesses to the agreement.)

8. Ask members to name various types of commitments people make. (marriage, budget pledges, “True Love Waits” promise, house/car leases, etc.)

Discuss the benefit of putting an agreement in writing.

Encourage Application

9. Ask members to look back over the passage and state ways Joshua taught and/or inspired the Israelites to be faithful to the Lord. (He led the people spiritually. He urged the people to fear the Lord and serve God faithfully. He warned them against failure to follow the Lord. He called the people to make a commitment and set up reminders of their commitment.)

10. Call for a moment of reflection. Ask: *With Joshua as an example, how can I influence others to follow God faithfully? How can I follow God more faithfully?*

Close with a prayer of commitment to follow and lead others to follow the Lord.

Optional activity: Make copies of the handout on this page and use it to supplement this moment of reflection, allowing members to write down their commitments in a more permanent form, holding themselves accountable for the decisions they make today.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

◆ Write the term “Power of Persuasion” on a marker board. Ask: *What persuasion would it take for you to follow:*

- a weight-loss plan?
- an exercise program?
- a monthly saving plan?
- a Bible reading schedule?
- a Scripture memory program?

Allow for responses. Then lead the class to consider what words and actions of others would influence them to take action. Ask: *How much would admonition (a gentle warning or word of counsel) from others influence you to take action?*

State that in today’s Bible lesson, we study the character of Joshua. Say: *Joshua as a young man was a slave in Egypt. After the exodus from Egypt, He became an aide to Moses. He was one of two spies who gave a good report of Canaan. He became a great warrior, and with God’s help, he led the army to victory at the battle of Jericho. In the Promise Land, Joshua spoke as the spiritual leader of the people. Before he died, he called*

the people to make a choice to follow God. He led the way and publicly dedicated himself and his family to God.

Say: *Today’s lesson asks us to consider how we are leading others to follow God faithfully.*

Encourage Application

◆ Call for a moment of reflection. Consider: *How can I inspire others so that my life brings out the best in their lives?*

Close in prayer that we would commit ourselves fully to the Lord and lead others to do so.

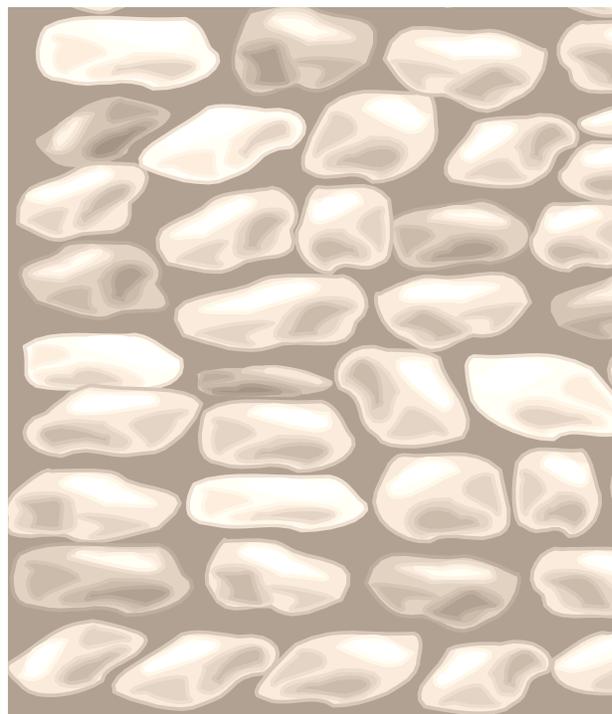
Optional handout for #10

Stones of Commitment

As a result of today’s study:

- How is God leading you to more faithfully follow Him?
- How can you influence others to follow God more faithfully?

List those commitments on the stones below.



Teaching Guide

Lesson 6: Deborah: Exercising Strong Leadership

Lesson Focus

Deborah, a prophetess and judge, delivered God’s message to Barak and exercised strong leadership in defeating Israel’s enemies.

Focal Text

Judges 4:1-16; 5:1-7

Memory Verse

“Hear, O kings! Listen, O rulers! I will sing to the Lord. I will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel.”
(Judges 5:3)

Connect with Life

1. Ask the class to name some areas of modern life where good leadership is required. Jot members’ responses on a marker board. (Areas might include the military, government, sports, church work, business, etc.)

Next, ask members to suggest qualities a good leader would possess. (social skills, managerial skills, ability to delegate, to see the big picture, to take risks, etc.)

Ask: *Do both men and women possess these qualities of leadership?*

2. Say: *In our Bible study today, we will focus on a woman who was a great leader in the Old Testament. Deborah was a prophetess and judge who exercised strong leadership in defeating Israel’s enemies. From our study, we will see that if we trust God, He will help us to become leaders in carrying out His plans.*

Guide the Study

3. Make sure the class knows these words:
Prophetess: a woman with ability to communicate messages between God and man
Judge: a person with wisdom from God to whom others come for advice

4. Read Judges 4:1-3 aloud to the class. Ask: *Besides being a prophetess and judge, what else was Deborah? (a wife)*

Allow the class to discuss the issues involved in a household when the woman wears many hats.

5. Referring to last week’s lesson, ask: *Judging from Joshua’s warning, what was likely the “sin” the people of Israel committed? (turning away from God and worshipping the gods of people around them)*

Ask: *Why do you think they fell into sin? (They had no one to lead them spiritually.)*

6. Ask someone to read Judges 4:4-7 aloud while the class listens for the message from God that Deborah delivered to the people. Use the image on the next page as a visual to supplement this part of the lesson.

Lead the class to review the main points in the battle plan delivered by Deborah. Explain that Barak was a military officer leading the armies of Israel.

7. Ask another member to read Judges 4:8-16 aloud while the class listens for the outcome of the battle. After reading, divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to summarize verses 8-11, and the other group to summarize verses 12-16. Allow time for review of the verses, then call for reports. (If the class is large, let the members work in pairs.)

8. Discuss the passage, using questions like these:
—*Why do you think Barak replied to Deborah as he did in verse 8?*
—*How does his response, “I will go if you will go with me,” enhance Deborah’s prestige as a woman warrior?*
—*Even in victory, why would Barak have no opportunity to boast?*
—*How do Deborah’s words in 4:14 illustrate her trust in God?*

9. If time permits, read the remaining verses in chapter 4 or briefly tell of Sisera’s death at the hands of Jael. Use the image on the next page of Jael as a visual, if desired.

Point out that both Barak and Sisera sought assistance from a woman, and in both situations, the defeat of the Canaanite army and the killing of Sisera, the victories belonged to women.

10. Invite a good reader to do a dramatic reading of the Song of Deborah from Judges 5:1-7. (Arrange for this reader prior to class, if needed.)

Refer to verse 7 and ask: *What is Deborah called?* (mother of Israel) Comment that even though this is a song of victory, Deborah gives praise to the Lord.

Encourage Application

11. Ask: *What lessons can both men and women get from this study?* (Possible responses: God uses all people to serve Him; women need not fear the call of God; God sometimes gives women opportunities to open new doors of service for Him; it is wise to listen to the voices of spiritual leaders whether they be male or female).

12. Consider the three questions in “Things to Think About” in the Study Guide. As time permits, call for responses to #1 and #2. Close in prayer that members would respond to God’s call to become leaders and courageously say, “Here am I; send me.”

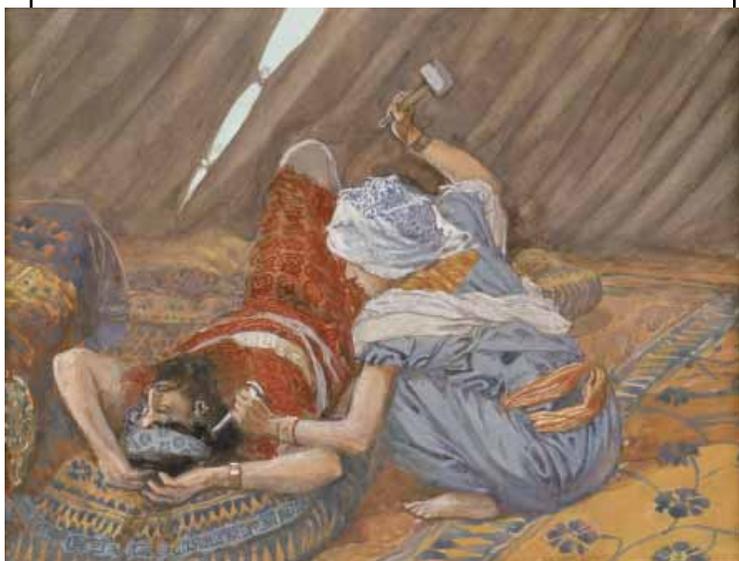
Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

♦ Ask members to think of a Christian woman they consider a leader. If appropriate, allow members to call out the name of the persons.

Ask: *What leadership qualities do these women possess?* Jot the qualities on a marker board.

Say: *In today’s Bible lesson, we look at an important woman who was a leader in the Old Testament. Deborah was a leader whom the Lord selected to deliver Israel from the hands of their enemies. We will notice her faith in God and the wisdom she demonstrated, and we’ll see that when we trust in God, we can become strong leaders, too.*

Jael Smote Sisera, and Slew Him, circa 1896-1902, by James Jacques Joseph Tissot (French, 1836-1902), Public Domain



Encourage Application

♦ Ask: *When God gives us victory in leading others, how do we respond? by boasting? by singing songs of praise to the Lord as Deborah did?*

State that Corrie ten Boom, a woman who led Jews to safety during World War II, said, “When we receive praise from others, we should collect the praises and lay them at the feet of Jesus.”

Say: *It pleases God when we thank Him for what He has done.*

Lead the class to say the Memory Verse together. Close with a prayer of commitment to follow God wherever He leads and to give praise to God for the victories.



Deborah the Prophetess, interpretation by Gustave Doré, Public Domain

Teaching Guide

Lesson 7: Samuel: Being Faithful to the Highest Allegiance

Lesson Focus

Samuel asserted that he had been fully faithful to the Lord and warned the people that they must serve the Lord faithfully with all their heart.

Focal Text

1 Samuel 12:1-5, 13-25

Memory Verse

“Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart. Think of the great things He has done for you.” (1 Samuel 12:24)

Connect with Life

1. Call attention to the word *allegiance* in today’s lesson title. Have a member read the definition from the Word List in the Study Guide.

Ask: *To what do all Americans pledge their allegiance?* (to the flag, the symbol of our country)

Invite a class member who knows the Pledge of Allegiance to quote it.

Ask: *To whom do Christians pledge their allegiance?* (to God—and never to other gods)

2. State that Samuel was a man whose allegiance was to God alone. In contrast, the people of Israel were prone to drift away from their allegiance to God. When they did, crises came; they would cry out to God and He would send a judge to deliver them. As a judge, Samuel showed the people how their sins caused the calamities they faced.

Even so, the people added one more sin: They demanded to have a king. They believed that with a king, their nation would become a mighty nation. Samuel knew Israel’s problems would not be solved by a king. Other nations were no threat to God’s people if they would trust Him.

3. Say: *In today’s Bible lesson, we read some of the last words of Samuel to the people. He recounts how he has been a good leader for the people. He warns them that even with a king, they must still obey and trust God. And he reminds them that in spite of their sin, God still loves them and has a purpose for them.*

Guide the Study

4. Invite someone to read 1 Samuel 12:1-5 aloud while the class listens for Samuel’s defense of himself as a leader among the people.

Ask: *How well did the people know Samuel? How had he lived before them?*

Ask the class to consider present day leaders, both church leaders and secular leaders. Discuss the encouragement that comes when leaders are respected servants of God and people.

5. State that in 1 Samuel 12:13-10, we see a great thing God did. Say: *Let’s read to discover why God did it.*

Call on volunteers to retell what happened.

Ask: *What did the thunderstorm demonstrate to the people?* (God’s power and His displeasure with their demand for a king)

What lesson do you think Samuel wanted the people to learn from the thunderstorm? (God is always in control; though He forgives sinners, there is a limit to His patience; because God is to be feared, they should be obedient.)

6. Invite the entire class to read 1 Samuel 12:20-23 aloud together. Lead a discussion with these questions:

—*What specific things did Samuel warn the people not to do?*

—*What did he tell them to do?*

—*What did Samuel promise to do for the people?*

7. Enlist someone to read 1 Samuel 12:24-25 aloud.

Ask members to call out the imperative verbs in these verses. List them vertically on a marker board. Then ask members to call out a completion to each sentence. (Follow the example below.)

Fear (the Lord)

Be faithful (to worship God with all your heart)

Think (of the great things God has done for you)

Ask: *What final warning does Samuel give the people?*

8. Lead the class to discuss why it is good to remember the past. (History teaches us what happens when we sin. We can learn from our mistakes. The past also reminds us of God’s faithfulness and His forgiveness of our sins.)

9. Ask: *What happened in the Israelites' past that they should have learned from?* (God freed them from slavery in Egypt, released them from bondage in Babylon, delivered them from enemies, gave them a land flowing with milk and honey, and blessed them with plenty.)

Say: *God is mighty and powerful and should be feared (honored, revered); He is also loving and merciful.*

Encourage Application

10. Lead the class to consider how Samuel's words to the people give us assurance today. Be sure to bring out God's patience with us, His grace in forgiving our sins, and His love and faithfulness to us as His children.

11. Before class, photocopy the Memory Verse cards on this page, cut apart, and distribute.

Read today's Memory Verse together as a class. Suggest that everyone review this verse daily during the coming week and look for ways to fear, serve, and consider the Lord in every circumstance. Close in prayer.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

♦ Ask if members in the class have ever written a letter of recommendation for another person.

Ask: *What did you say to illustrate that the individual was a good and worthy person?*

After responses, ask: *What would you say in a letter commending yourself? Would it make any difference if the person receiving the letter knew you well?*

State that in the Bible lesson today, Samuel recounts his faithfulness to God and his trustworthiness as a leader among the people. Even though the people had sinned by demanding a king, he would not turn his back on them. Because of his allegiance to God, he would pray for them.

We learn from Samuel's example how we should treat others. Our attitudes and actions toward others are a reflection of our faith and allegiance to God.

Encourage Application

♦ In groups of twos or as an entire class, discuss the questions in "Things to Think About" from the Study Guide. Close in prayer that all members would have God as their highest allegiance.

1. *What do you pledge allegiance to?*
2. *What is the greatest of all allegiances?*
3. *What great things have you seen God do?*

"Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart.

Think of the great things He has done for you."

(1 Samuel 12:24)

"Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart.

Think of the great things He has done for you."

(1 Samuel 12:24)

"Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart.

Think of the great things He has done for you."

(1 Samuel 12:24)

"Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart.

Think of the great things He has done for you."

(1 Samuel 12:24)

"Only fear the Lord and be faithful to worship Him with all your heart.

Think of the great things He has done for you."

(1 Samuel 12:24)

Photocopy these Memory Verse cards to distribute to the class.

Teaching Guide

Lesson 8: David and Nathan: Accepting Personal Responsibility for Sin

Lesson Focus

After being challenged by Nathan, King David accepted personal responsibility for his sins and confessed that he had sinned against God.

Focal Text

2 Samuel 11:2-15; 12:1-13a

Memory Verse

“When death had power over your life you were not right with God. What good did you get from the things you are now ashamed? Those things bring death.”
(Romans 6:1-2)

Connect with Life

1. Write the expression “Fall from Grace” on a marker board and invite responses from members who are familiar with the expression. As needed, add that the expression is usually used to refer to a person of noble character and highly admired who falls into an awful sin.

2. Explain that today’s Bible lesson is about such a man. David, Israel’s second king, had fulfilled all the expectations of the people. He led Israel to a period of prosperity. The Lord was with him. Yet this man of wisdom and a godly spirit fell into ruthless sins.

Say: As we study the failures of David, we will be led to examine our own weaknesses and need for forgiveness. Seeing how God forgave David offers great hope for our own spiritual renewal when we accept personal responsibility for our sin.

Guide the Study

3. Before class, ask a member to prepare to read 2 Samuel 11:2-15 aloud in class. As she/he reads, ask the class to note David’s actions and his attempts to cover up his sin. Write their answers on the marker board.

Ask members to name the sins that David committed which led to the sin of murder. (coveting the wife of another man, adultery, dishonesty, murder)

If desired, use the image (next page) of Nathan confronting David as a visual.

4. Brainstorm with the class what might have happened

if David had stopped the progression of sin at various points in the sequence of events.

5. Further discuss the passage with these questions:
- How did David’s position as king provide greater opportunity to sin? (He had to answer to no one. But his position and power did not afford him an escape from God.)
 - Have we ever used “because I can” as an excuse for sinning?
 - How did David’s sin affect others? (Sin always carries consequences, even when there is forgiveness. Violence in his own family plagued David’s reign.)
 - How does our sin affect others? (It has a devastating effect on people who trust us.)

6. Suggest that members read dramatically 2 Samuel 12:1-13a. Enlist volunteers to read the words of narrator, Nathan, and David. (Use the Scripture printed in the Study Guide so all will have the same translation.)

7. After the reading, lead the class to discuss these “Do You Think...?” questions:

Do You Think...?

Do you think Nathan was fearful about confronting King David? Why?

What do you think about the method Nathan used (telling the story) as a way to confront someone who is doing wrong?

What do you think would have happened if David had continued to deny his sin even after Nathan confronted him?

Why do you think it is hard to say, “I have sinned”?

Encourage Application

8. *Say: Confession does not wipe out the consequences of our sin in our future, but repentance and confession of*

sin does bring about God’s forgiveness. It restores us to fellowship with Him.

9. Ask: *What are some areas of temptation that godly men and women (and we ourselves) might face?* (Responses might include sexual misconduct, lack of self-control, dishonest dealings, overeating, slothfulness, etc.) List these areas on the marker board in one column entitled *Temptations*.

In another column entitled *Consequences*, lead the class to discuss consequences that are possible for each area mentioned.

| Temptations | Consequences |
|------------------------|------------------|
| (samples) | |
| Dishonesty in business | IRS audit |
| Impulsive spending | Credit card debt |

10. Close with a prayer that we would guard our own heart, paying attention to our behavior, and seeking God’s counsel in our daily life. Also, thank God for the forgiveness He gives when we confess to Him that we have sinned.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

♦ Ask the class to reflect privately on these questions: Think of a time when you sinned or did a wrong action for which you accepted responsibility—or denied it.

Ask: *What was the outcome of your acceptance or denial? How did you feel about it at the time? How do you feel about it now?* State that accepting responsibility for sin is an important aspect of godly living.

Say: *Today’s lesson is a sad story. It is about a king who was the most powerful man in the world, but who, because of his sin, created a horrible situation which no amount of human manipulation could fix. David, the king, needed the forgiveness only God gives. His sin had separated him from God. Only God’s forgiveness and grace could restore him to fellowship*

with a holy God. But first, David needed to accept responsibility for his sin.

Encourage Application

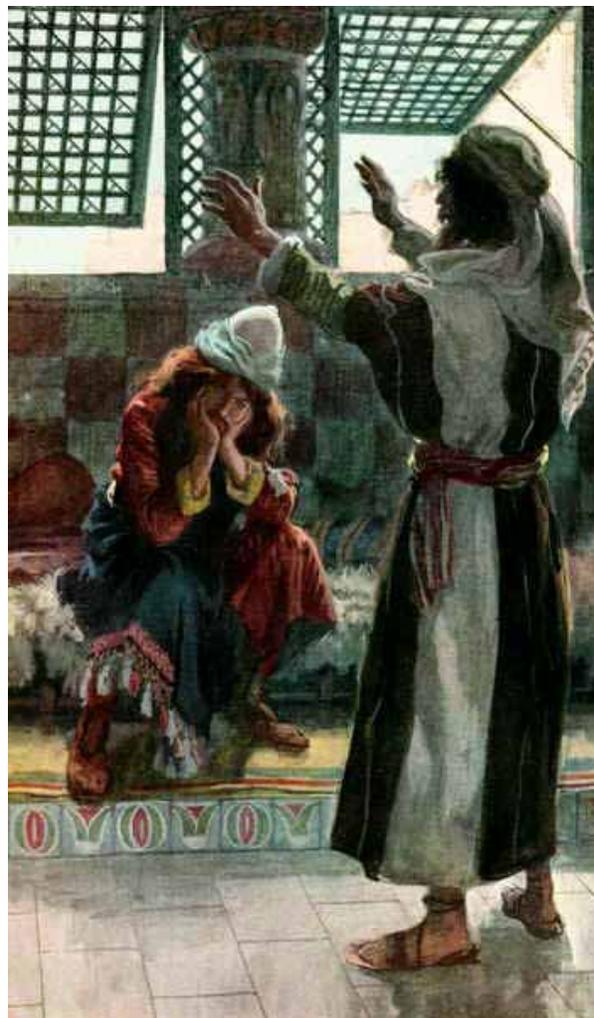
♦ Emphasize that because Jesus died for our sins, we have the confidence that no one is beyond God’s grace.

Say: *Perhaps this lesson brings to mind people we know who have committed sins that surprised and disappointed us. We may also have been disappointed in our own behavior. No one is immune from sin.*

Lead members to consider steps to take that will help us pay attention to our behavior in order to be strong in resisting temptation. What are ways we can seek God’s help in being true to Him?

Lead the class to pray for one another to seek God’s counsel and strength in resisting temptation.

“Nathan Reproaches David,” by J. James Tissot, Public Domain



Teaching Guide

Lesson 9: Amos: Facing Opposition Courageously

Lesson Focus

Although Amos had no professional religious authority, he spoke God’s message of judgment courageously in spite of opposition.

Focal Text

Amos 1:1-2; 2:6-16; 7:10-17

Memory Verse

“Let what is good and what is right keep me safe, because I wait for you.” (Psalm 25:21)

Connect with Life

1. Lead the class to name issues some Christians speak out against. Explain that they need not indicate whether they are for or against the issue. Write a list of issues on a marker board. (Possible issues include abortion, homosexuality, illegal immigrants, big government, high taxes, national debt, etc.)

Ask: Are the messages by Christians received or rejected by most people? What kind of person would make a good spokesperson for a cause?

2. *Say: Today we will look at a person who courageously delivered a message from God, even in the face of opposition.*

Guide the Study

3. Enlist someone to read Amos 1:1-2 aloud. Lead the members to state the main points given about Amos and the conditions of the time when he spoke.

Ask: How would you interpret Amos’ message to the people? (God was about to speak in a loud voice [perhaps because He had reached the limit of His patience] and bring devastation on the land and people because of their sin. It was a message of judgment.)

4. Point out that in Amos 2:6-8, we read how Amos delivered another message of judgment of God on the people. Read the passage aloud while members listen for the ways the Israelites violated God’s purpose. Call for members to respond. (oppressed and abused the poor, the weak and the powerless; engaged in sexual acts forbidden in the law)

Ask: What might be some modern day parallels to these sins?

5. Point out that often in Scripture, God reminds the people of all He has done for them.

Say: In Amos 2:9-16, we see both God’s love and God’s judgment.

Read verses 9-12 while members pay attention to the action words following “I” as God recounts all He has done for the people. (I destroyed [2x], I brought, I raised.) Point out that the people knew all that God had done for them, but they so quickly forgot His goodness. They had been slaves in Egypt, and now they were treating their own people like slaves.

6. Read Amos 2:14-16. *Ask: What action word follows “I” in verse 13? (I will crush)*

Ask: How would the tables be turned in this powerful judgment from God? (Those who abused the helpless would become helpless.)

How do you think the people of Israel reacted to this message directed to them?

How do you think Amos felt about delivering this message of judgment? (sorrow? fear?)

7. Explain that Amaziah was the king’s appointed priest. He rejected both Amos’ message and the prophet himself. Choose three people to do a dramatic reading of Amos 7:10-17, reading the parts of narrator, Amaziah, and Amos. Allow time for the entire class to skim the verses and prepare for the drama.

8. Discuss the passage using these questions:

What did Amaziah accuse Amos of? (in modern language, treason)

How did Amaziah try to silence Amos? (telling him to leave town)

How did Amos explain that he had been called by God? (He said that he was not a religious leader. He was a common shepherd, but he had a responsibility to respond to God’s call to deliver God’s message to the people.)

Encourage Application

9. Refer back to #1 under Connect with Life and ask: *If God gave you the responsibility of speaking out about*

one of the issues we listed, what are some ways you could do it? Under what circumstances would your message be most effective?

10. Encourage the class with these words:

Sometimes we are timid or afraid to speak on behalf of Christ. But we should not be afraid. The Lord was with Amos, and He is with us. Courage is not doing what comes easily. It is doing even what we are afraid of because it is the right thing to do.

11. Close with a prayer of commitment to respond to God’s call on our lives to speak for Him.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

♦ Begin class with these comments:

God calls people to service—young, old, female, male. He is not limited to whom He chooses. When God calls, we have the opportunity to follow Him with courage or to decline. The first step in willing service is to walk closely with God so that we hear His call and know His message.

Say: Today’s lesson focuses on Amos, a regular guy who responded to God’s call on his life. He was a man of courage. He delivered a message from God that was unpopular. If we are willing, God will enable us to speak for Him to others.

Encourage Application

♦ Ask: *Have you ever believed God called you to deliver a message from Him to someone else? How did you explain that God had called you? How was the message received? What did it take (or what will it take) for you to deliver a message from God effectively? (Responses may include wisdom, courage, boldness, humility, love, etc.)*

Lead members to consider how they would respond if someone delivered a message from God to them. Discuss question #1 under “Things to Think About” in the Study Guide.

Close in prayer that each member would serve God willingly and with courage, even when it means delivering an unpopular message from God.

Teaching Guide

Lesson 10: Micaiah: Telling the Truth

Lesson Focus

Micaiah courageously and faithfully spoke God’s truth, even though it was unpopular and dangerous to do so.

Focal Text

1 Kings 22:6-28

Memory Verse

“Those who are lost in sin will be fooled by the things he can do. They are lost in sin because they did not love the truth that would save them.” (2 Thessalonians 2:10)

Connect with Life

1. Present this case study:

Mrs. Chu watched as her only son and his wife climbed the corporate ladder, giving less and less time to their children. Mrs. Chu knew her grandchildren needed parents who were there to guide and show them love. After many months of praying, Mrs. Chu felt God calling her to speak to her son and daughter-in-law about their neglect of their children. She felt she should warn that a lifestyle like theirs would bring much sorrow to their family.

Ask: *If you were Mrs. Chu, how would you respond to God’s call? What danger does Mrs. Chu face if she speaks to her son and daughter-in-law? What danger would she face if she declined to obey the Lord’s call?*

2. Say: *Today we study the Bible character, Micaiah, a prophet not well-known but one who spoke the truth when it was unpopular and dangerous to do so.* (suggested pronunciation: muh-KIE-uh)

Guide the Study

3. Today’s Bible passage is quite long, but very dramatic (1 Kings 22:6-28). It would be helpful if your students read today’s Scripture passage before class time. Consider how you might get the assignment to them, using email, phone, text, a postcard in the mail, etc.

In class, consider having an invited guest read the passage dramatically. (As an alternative, record the passage and play the recording in class.)

4. Explain that the events in today’s lesson took place during a time when Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Ahab was king of Israel, the northern kingdom, and Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, the southern kingdom. The kingdom was divided, but the people were brothers.

5. After the members have read or heard the passage read, lead them to tell the story orally. Ask one member to begin the story, another to add to it, etc., until the entire story is told, and every member has participated. If a member needs help in recalling the details, allow others to help or prompt with a question.

6. Before class, make copies of the handout on the next page, one per class member. Bring extra pens.

Divide the class into small groups, at least two to a group. Pass out a handout sheet and pen to each member. Assign half the groups to answer questions 1-4 and the other half to answer questions 5-8. Ask them to jot brief answers/responses on their paper. Allow a time for groups to work. Then call for oral reports.

Questions are listed here with answers.

Discussion Questions (1 Kings 22:6-28)

1. v. 7...*What does Jehoshaphat’s wanting to inquire of “another man” suggest?* (unease, distrust of the other prophets)
2. v. 8...*What does the king of Israel’s admission that he hated Micaiah indicate?* (He may have had previous encounters with Micaiah.) *Do you find his response amusing?*
3. v. 8b...*Why do you think Jehoshaphat reprimanded the king of Israel as he did?*
4. v. 12... *All 400 prophets agreed that the Lord would give success to the king of Israel. Do you think they really believed that or were they afraid of the king?*
5. v. 15b...*Why do you think Micaiah appeared to agree with the other prophets? Was it sarcasm?*
6. v. 17...*What meaning would you give to Micaiah’s vision of Israel?* (The loss of the leader indicates the death of the king—the end of Ahab and his reign.)
7. v. 26-27...*What punishment did the king of Israel order for Micaiah?*
8. v. 28...*How was Micaiah able to respond as he did?*

7. Refer to verses 19-23. Point out that Micaiah’s courage was evident not only in challenging the words of the other prophets but also in the message he delivered. The picture in these verses is of a heavenly council in which God reveals His plan to put a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets.

Explain that in Micaiah’s day, people believed that everything that happened was under the control of God. God is in control of everything, but He does not cause bad things to happen. Emphasize that Ahab still had a choice. He could have followed the word of the true prophet of God. But he decided against Micaiah’s word.

8. If time permits, read how Micaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled (22:29-40) or be prepared to summarize the main points. Remind the class that for Micaiah, obeying God was more important than even life itself. For the king of Israel, disobeying God brought about his death.

Encourage Application

9. Ask the members to state lessons they learned from today’s study that they can apply to their own life. Be sure some of the following lessons are mentioned:
 —*Courage to speak the truth is important—but not easy.*
 —*Living for Christ sometimes means going against the crowd.*
 —*Sometimes we are called on to disagree with religious leaders.*
 —*We should always speak the truth with care and humility.*

10. Close in prayer that all members would have the courage to speak the truth as God calls.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

♦ Ask question #1, “Things to Think About” from the Study Guide: *Why should preachers preach the truth rather than the message people want to hear?* (Receive responses.)

Ask: *What is necessary for preachers to preach the truth?* (They must know the truth; they must be called by God to speak the truth; they must have courage.)

State that today’s lesson is about a prophet whom God called to deliver words of truth to a person of power. Even though he faced intimidation and danger, he obeyed God. We too are sometimes called by God to speak an unpopular truth to someone. It takes courage to obey.

Encourage Application

♦ Discuss with the class this question: *How can one be sure of one’s call before delivering a message that others may not want to hear?* (Answers should include such things as seeking God in earnest prayer, asking God to reaffirm His call, getting counsel from a godly friend.)

Close in prayer, asking God to help us be good listeners to His call and courageous spokespersons on behalf of Him to others.

Handout to be copied for use with #6

Discussion Questions (1 Kings 22:-6-28)

1. v. 7...What does Jehoshaphat’s wanting to inquire of “another man” suggest?
2. v. 8...What does the king of Israel’s admission that he hated Micaiah indicate? Do you find his response amusing?
3. v. 8*b*...Why do you think Jehoshaphat reprimanded the king of Israel as he did?
4. v. 12...All 400 prophets agreed that the Lord would give success to the king of Israel. Do you think they really believed that or were they afraid of the king?
5. v. 15*b*...Why do you think Micaiah appeared to agree with the other prophets? Was it sarcasm?
6. v. 17...What meaning would you give to Micaiah’s vision of Israel?
7. v. 26-27...What punishment did the king of Israel order for Micaiah?
8. v. 28...How was Micaiah able to respond as he did?

Teaching Guide

Lesson 11: Huldah: Interpreting and Proclaiming God's Message

Lesson Focus

Huldah, a woman who was a prophet, interpreted and proclaimed God's message.

Focal Text

2 Chronicles 34:19-31

Memory Verse

“Preach the Word of God. Preach it when it is easy and people want to listen and when it is hard and people do not want to listen. Preach it all the time. Use the Word of God to show people they are wrong. Use the Word of God to help them do right. You must be willing to wait for people to understand what you teach as you teach them.” (2 Timothy 4:2)

Connect with Life

1. Ask class members to relate a time when they received a word of direction or advice from a woman. (a teacher, mother, aunt, neighbor, friend)

Ask: *How did you receive it? Did you believe her words or direction were from God? Why or why not?*

2. State that in the Old Testament, God called gifted women to serve as spokespersons for Him. Today, too, He speaks through women to interpret and proclaim His messages to those who are willing to receive and understand.

3. Present this background material for today's lesson. *In the Old Testament throughout the reign of kings, the record shows that some were “good” kings and some were “bad” kings. The standard was always their faithfulness to God's will as revealed in the law. When kings and people became corrupt, God would send a prophet who passed judgment on their actions and called the people back to God.*

Today's Bible lesson covers the time when a good king, Josiah, was inspired to return the people to live and worship the true God. He was open to the words of God's prophets. God gave Huldah, a prophetess, a message for Josiah, and he listened.

If desired, use the image on the next page to illustrate this lesson.

Guide the Study

4. Enlist three class members to read 2 Chronicles 34:19-31, one as the narrator, another as Josiah, and another as Huldah. (Use the Scripture printed in the Study Guide.)

Refer to verses 19-21 and ask:

—*Why was Josiah upset when he heard the words of God's book read? (He knew what the words said, but he didn't know what they meant. He needed an interpreter.)*

Refer to verses 22-31 and ask:

—*Does it surprise you that Josiah's officials, three men, went to seek the word of the Lord from a woman? (Emphasize that God used women as well as men to speak His truth in the Bible. Huldah's voice as a spokesperson was valid. Her authority was never questioned.)*

—*What was Huldah's main message to the officials? (Judah's past sins would result in defeat and bring calamity to the nation.)*

—*How did Josiah's humility and openness to God affect his personal fate? (God's judgment would not come until after Josiah's death.)*

—*Do you think Huldah's message was clear? Was it spoken with confidence? How was she prepared to speak for God?*

5. Point out that God used Huldah to speak to a king. She had courage to speak the truth. Josiah followed her interpretation and led Judah to renew its covenant with God. As long as Josiah lived, he faithfully directed his people toward God.

Encourage Application

6. Ask: *What would help you believe that a person truly had been given words or directions from God to share with you? (Give members time to think and discuss their opinion. Responses may include: The person knows God's Word, walks closely with the Lord, and has a strong prayer life.)*

7. Close in prayer, asking God to help us become good listeners, willing to receive messages from Him even when the messenger is an unlikely source.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

◆ Ask class members to relate a time when they sought out a godly person to ask his/her interpretation of happenings in your life.

Ask: *What drew you to that person? How did you receive the interpretation that the person gave you? How did you evaluate whether the message was a word from God?*

Encourage Application

◆ Lead the class to discuss the dangers involved in missing God’s message.

Ask: *From today’s lesson, what do we learn about receiving God’s message? (We should be willing to receive God’s message from whatever messenger God chooses to use.)*

Close in prayer that everyone would willingly receive God’s message and messengers when He wants to speak to us.

◆ As time permits, review the Word List and ask the class if any other words from the Study Guide needed further explanation.

Discuss questions 2-3 from “Things to Think About” in the Study Guide:

2. *Is it important “to wait for people to understand as you teach them”—and why is it important?*

3. *What does your life say to others?*

“Josiah consults Huldah,” woodcut, published 1702, author unknown



Teaching Guide

Lesson 12: Jeremiah: Being Faithful in the Depths of Despair

Lesson Focus

The challenges Jeremiah faced in serving God led him to great despair, but he courageously remained faithful.

Focal Text

Jeremiah 20:7-18; 26:1-15

Memory Verse

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not trust in your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)

Connect with Life

1. As members arrive, direct their attention to this statement written on a marker board:

Difficulties
go with being
a minister.

Ask members to consider the statement and mention difficulties they can see that ministers face. Receive responses, then ask: *In light of these difficulties, would you respond to a call from God to serve? Would you pray that God would call one of your children to serve?*

2. Point out that being a minister can be really tough at times. A minister must have a bold commitment to his calling, a love for his people, and an assurance of God’s presence and strength with him, even in the difficult times.

Ask: *How often do you thank your pastor or minister for his or her dedication to you and your congregation?*

3. Explain that today’s lesson is about Jeremiah, a prophet-minister. He faced a major challenge of trying to convince God’s people that their behavior should change in order to please God. But the people were unwilling to listen. Years of rejection and even threats of death

dragged Jeremiah into discouragement. Still, he remembered God’s calling on his life, and with it, the promise of God’s presence. Emphasize that on our tough days, we can be assured that God is with us, too.

Guide the Study

4. Enlist a member to read Jeremiah aloud 20:7-10 while the class listens for Jeremiah’s lament of life. (Optional: Display the images of the painting of Jeremiah, which show him in a state of despair or lament.)

Ask these questions after the passage has been read aloud:

—*How would you describe Jeremiah’s state of mind?* (discouraged, dejected)

—*What times are you most likely to feel this way?*

—*What was the reason for the lament?* (being humiliated, stressed, accosted by friends and foe)

—*Why do you think Jeremiah believed that God had abandoned him?* (The accumulation of difficulties, his physical and mental fatigue, being assaulted by others—all affected his judgment and mental state.)

5. Enlist another member to read aloud Jeremiah 20:11-18 while the class listens for Jeremiah’s praise of God.

Ask:

—*How can you explain Jeremiah’s change in emotion from complaint to praise (verses 11-13)?*

—*How can you explain Jeremiah’s change in emotion from praise to complaint (verses 14-18)?*

6. Point out that emotions are real, and under physical, emotional, and spiritual duress, emotions can swing back and forth to extremes. We, like Jeremiah, may face hard conditions that challenge us and crush our spirit. We can share in Jeremiah’s depth of discouragement, and we can also find encouragement in his faithfulness through hard times.

7. Read Jeremiah 26:1-15 aloud to the class. Explain that Jeremiah was again in a challenging situation—but his attitude had changed. God told him to preach a shocking message to the people. They should change or God would make the temple in Jerusalem fall.

Ask: *How did the people react to Jeremiah’s message? How did Jeremiah face the opposition?* (with calm assurance)

Encourage Application

8. Lead the class to discuss ways they can prepare to face opposition when they are led to speak out against something. List the principles on a marker board. Lead in a prayer that members would be faithful to God even in the midst of challenge and despair.

9. Consider planning a class project that would show appreciation to a minister in your church. Receive suggestions and schedule a time during the week to make further plans.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

◆ Distribute a half-sheet of paper and pen to class members. Ask that they think of an unpleasant circumstance in their life right now, one that perhaps has been a disappointment, and write a complaint to God. Allow a time for writing their complaint, then ask them

*Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem,
Rembrandt, ca. 1630, Public Domain*



to write their thoughts about God and His promises that give them encouragement to face the disappointment. Invite members to share what they wrote about God's promises that encourage them.

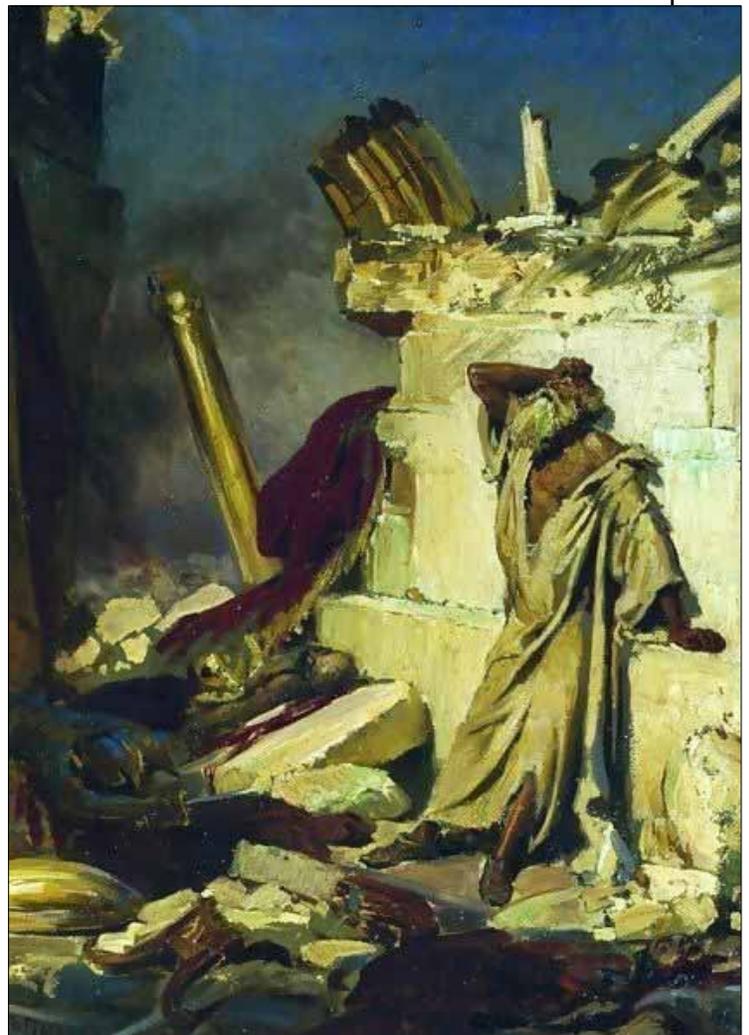
Inform the class that the lesson today will help us discover how Jeremiah's life and the way he faced challenges can encourage us when we face hardships.

Encourage Application

◆ Discuss in small groups how today's lesson has affected their understanding of how God's people can face discouragement, yet be assured that we are not alone; His presence is always with us.

Close with a prayer of commitment that in moments of despair or depression we will always remember the promise of God's presence with us.

Review today's Memory Verse and suggest that members reflect on it during the week when they meet difficulties.



*"Cry of prophet Jeremiah on the Ruins of Jerusalem,"
Ilya Yefimovich Repin, Public Domain*

Teaching Guide

Lesson 13: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Giving Unlimited Devotion to God

Lesson Focus

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego vowed to give their full devotion to God even if they perished.

Focal Text

Daniel 3

Memory Verse

“The One Who called you is faithful and will do what He has promised.” (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

Connect with Life

1. During the week before today’s session, search for stories of Christians around the world who face persecution for their beliefs. Stories like these are often in Christian publications and can also be found at the Voice of the Martyrs website (www.persecution.com). Perhaps you know someone personally or have someone in your church who has faced persecution. Begin class by telling one of these stories.

2. Lead the class to focus on their own personal devotion to God. Ask members to consider: *What level of risk am I willing to take to express my devotion to God?*

Allow a moment for reflection, then extend the question by asking: *Are you willing to risk your money? social standing? family rejection? abuse? death?*

3. Explain that today’s lesson will help us determine at what length we are willing to go to express our devotion to God.

Guide the Study

4. Choose four good readers and form a panel of readers to sit before the class.

Divide Daniel 3 into four portions and assign verses as follows: person 1, verses 1-7; person 2, verses 8-18; person 3, verses 19-25; and person 4, verses 26-30.

After the entire chapter is read, lead a discussion using the following questions. (As a variation, ask each reader to lead the discussion for the verses he/she read. Ahead of class, prepare copies of the questions for each reader. Make an extra copy of this lesson and simply cut out the Discussion Question boxes. Your lesson plan

will still contain the answers to the questions, but the discussion boxes will not.)

5. Focus discussion on verses 8-18:

—*What might have motivated “all the people” to bow down to the object of worship of the king?* (The threat of the king who had power over them. Their faith in God failed. They lived in exile among a pagan people.)

—*Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego find it unthinkable to follow the king’s command?* (They remained faithful to God’s laws. They remembered the Ten Commandments. The act of bowing was an act of idol worship which God had forbidden.)

Discussion Questions for Verses 1-7

- What might have motivated “all the people” to bow down to the object of worship of the king?*
- Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego find it unthinkable to follow the king’s command?*

6. Focus discussion on verses 8-18:

—*Why do you think the astrologers made the accusations about the three young men?* (to curry favor with the king; to accuse the “foreigners”)

—*How would you describe the young men’s response to the king?* (confidence that their lives were in God’s hands.)

—*Was survival the most important value to them? What was?* (faithfulness)

Discussion Questions for Verses 8-18

- Why do you think the astrologers made the accusations about the three young men?*
- How would you describe the young men’s response to the king?*
- Was survival the most important value to them? What was?*

7. Focus discussion on verses 19-25:
 —*Why do you think God allowed the three young men to be thrown into the fire?* (The record in the Old Testament shows that God supported His faithful servants. God is faithful to us when we are faithful to Him.)
 —*What details do you see that add drama to the story?* (The men were completely clothed—which would increase the swiftness of their burning and ultimate death.)

**Discussion Questions
 for Verses 19-25**

—*Why do you think God allowed the three young men to be thrown into the fire?*
 —*What details do you see that add drama to the story?*

8. Focus discussion on verses 26-30:
 —*How had the king’s attitude changed?*
 —*How did God reward the faith of the three men?*

**Discussion Questions
 for Verses 26-30**

—*How had the king’s attitude changed?*
 —*How did God reward the faith of the three men?*

9. Add these comments:
The king’s efforts to force worship before a pagan idol had backfired. As a result of their faithfulness, the three young men had gained respect for the Lord they served. In the words of Nebuchadnezzar, “There is no other god who is able to save in this way.” Rather than being burned to death, the three men were promoted!

Encourage Application

10. Lead class members to consider questions such as these:
 —*How can we remain faithful to God when our faith is challenged today?*
 —*What price are we willing to pay to support the work God wants to do in the world?*
 —*What support can we give to causes that carry God’s witness into places of need in our world?*

11. Close in prayer that everyone would be as faithful as Daniel and his friends.

**Supplemental Teaching Ideas
 Connect with Life**

◆ Present this true story:
Sneha came from India to the U.S. to complete a Master’s degree in computer science, a goal she had set her heart on achieving. When her father, a staunch Hindu, learned that Sneha had become a Christian, he threatened to cut off funding for her studies and refused to talk with her. All communications with her mother had to be done in secret. Sneha remained strong in her faith. Today, she is trusting God for her future and is praying that one day all her family will no longer bow down to idols but will accept Christ as their only God.
 (Receive responses. Then ask: *How prevalent in our world are stories like that of Sneha?*)

Point out that many Christians around the world face persecution for their faith in following the Lord. Stories of how Christians live out their faith under pressure inspire us.

Ask these questions of your class members:
 —*Is the way you live out your faith under pressure an inspiration to others?*
 —*If you were faced with challenges to your faith, what price might you be willing to pay to remain faithful to your Christian beliefs?*

State that the Book of Daniel opens with stories about a faithful Daniel and his three friends. The story of their faithfulness under pressure has encouraged countless generations of believers. We, too, can draw strength from their story for our lives today.

Encourage Application

◆ Refer to the story of Sneha. Lead the class to share times when they or someone they know faced a challenge similar to hers.

Ask: *What in Sneha’s story and the story of Daniel and his friends inspires you to faithfulness?*

Close with a prayer of gratitude for God’s faithfulness to us when He died for our sins.

Remind the class to review the Memory Verse and questions in “Things to Think About” during their personal devotions during the coming week.

Teaching Guide

Lesson 14: Esther: Taking the Ultimate Risk

Lesson Focus

Though Esther was unsure of the outcome, she risked her life to enable her people to escape death.

Focal Text

Esther 4:1-16

Memory Verse

“Nothing should be done because of pride or thinking about yourself. Think of other people as more important than yourself. Do not always be thinking about your own plans only. Be happy to know what other people are doing.” (Philippians 2:3-4)

Connect with Life

1. Prior to class, look for news stories of people who have done heroic deeds. In class, present one example, and then ask members to recall stories they know of people who have risked their lives to save others. (Stories may relate to natural disasters around the world, war events, medical transplants, etc.)

2. Announce that today’s lesson is about a beautiful young woman who risked her life to save her people.

Guide the Study

3. To review the first three chapters of Esther, prepare a written summary similar to the one below. Ask a member to read it aloud. As an alternative, if members are familiar with the story, the main points could be brought out by asking questions. For example: *Who raised Esther after her parents died? What was she told not to tell the king? Who was Haman?*

Summary of Esther 1-3

Esther was an orphan brought up by her cousin, Mordecai. When Queen Vashti fell out of favor with King Ahasuerus, he looked for a beautiful girl to replace her. After an elaborate beauty contest, Esther was chosen, but she was told by Mordecai not to tell that she was a Jew. Within the court of the king, a man named Haman ruled over all the princes. Everyone bowed down to Haman except Mordecai. This angered Haman, and to get revenge, he sought to have Mordecai and all the

Jews killed. Accusing the Jews of not obeying the king’s laws, Haman convinced the king to issue an order to destroy, to kill, and to put an end to all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day. Hearing of the king’s edict, Mordecai told Esther that she must act! Perhaps she had come to the throne for such a time as this.

4. Enlist a member to read Esther 4:1-9 aloud while the class listens for Mordecai’s response to the king’s plan. Lead discussion, using these questions:

- How did Mordecai and the Jews express their grief?*
- What modern day parallel is there to the ways people express their grief or dissatisfaction with circumstances they can’t change? (protests, signature campaigns, hunger strikes, etc.)*
- How was Mordecai prepared for his response to the queen’s query? (He knew the exact amount of money promised to Haman. He had a copy of the king’s law to send to Esther.)*
- What do you think was Esther’s first response to the news from Mordecai?*

5. Ask another member to read Esther 4:10-15 aloud while the group listens for Esther’s hesitancy in responding to Mordecai’s instructions. Lead the class in discussion, using these questions:

- How was Esther’s influence limited in the royal court?*
- How might her response been different if she had freedom to act and speak without cultural restraints?*
- Are there cultures today that do not give wives the freedom to express their views?*
- How did Mordecai challenge Esther’s hesitancy to put herself at risk? (He reminded her that the death of the Jews would include her.)*

6. Refer to verse 14 and point out that this verse is the nearest reference to God in the Book of Esther. As faithful Jews, both Mordecai and Esther would perceive God’s hand in human events without actually using His name. Mordecai believed God was at work in this situation. He perceived that Esther’s unlikely rise to power may be God’s provision for the Jews in their current situation. Ask members to review the passage and look for evidence that shows Esther’s and Mordecai’s faith. (Mordecai believed God could use

Esther to save the Jews; he believed if Esther chose not to participate, help would come from another place; Esther overcame fear for her life because she knew she had a higher responsibility to God; she believed God was involved in the situation by asking the Jews to fast and pray.)

7. Lead the class in reading verses 15-16 aloud together.

Ask:

—*How does Esther show that she understood the clear personal danger in her decision?*

—*Why did Esther decide to risk her life?* (She could not ignore her responsibility to her Jewish people to act as God’s agent to spare them.)

—*What does Esther’s request for a national fast indicate about her faith?* (She acknowledged that God was involved and only through His intervention would her people be saved.)

8. Point out that self-sacrifice is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Jesus told His followers to “take up [your] cross daily and follow Me.” To die to self means that we are available to live for Christ by risking our very lives for the sake of others.

9. Enlist a member to read verse 17 aloud while the class listens for how Mordecai and Esther’s roles are reversed.

Ask: *How is Esther now in charge?*

Explain that Esther received the king’s approval and secured the reversal of the fate of her people. Haman fell, and the Jews rose in power. Today, each spring the Jews continue to celebrate this victory over evil in the Feast of Purim.

Encourage Application

10. Ask: *Has there ever been a time in your life when you perceived God had placed you in a difficult circumstance for the purpose of helping someone else?* (Allow time for reflection and sharing.) Close in prayer that members would accept responsibility and take risks necessary to extend help to others.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas

Connect with Life

♦ As members arrive, hand them a pen and slip of paper on which is written the phrase *Survival Instinct*. Ask that they write words that come to mind when they think of this phrase. Allow time for writing before calling for reports. Discuss how survival instinct can cause people to act either heroically or selfishly. Invite members to share from their personal experience or knowledge.

Explain that today’s lesson is a drama of real-life proportion. The story involves Esther and her elder cousin, Mordecai, both Jews who were living in a foreign culture. Under very unlikely circumstances, God used Esther to become queen and intercede powerfully for her people.

Encourage Application

♦ Ask the class to suggest some factors that might move people to help others or to turn their backs on problems. Jot responses on a marker board.

Ask: *How does trusting God’s sovereignty over our lives affect our willingness to help or serve others?*

Close in prayer that each member would follow Esther’s example and have the right attitude and action when called upon to serve others.

Suggest that members reflect on the questions in “Things to Think About” in the Study Guide during their personal quiet time the coming week.



Above image from Bibletodaykids.com/Esther.html

Below: “Esther Denouncing Haman,” Ernest Normand, ca. 1915, Public Domain



Teaching Guide

Lesson 15: Nehemiah: Standing Up for People

Lesson Focus

Nehemiah demonstrated unselfish concern for his people by returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall and by calling for justice for the needy.

Focal Text

Nehemiah 2:1-5; 5:1-13

Memory Verse

“Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you? He wants you to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him. He wants you to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 10:12)

Connect with Life

1. Write the words HELP WANTED on a sheet of plain paper and hold it up for members to see.

Pass out half sheets of paper and pens and explain that you will be asking whether they might be willing to extend help involving five different situations. Tell them to write *yes* if they are willing and *no* if they are unwilling.

Read the following five statements:

- Someone in your Sunday school class needs transportation every week to the medical clinic for treatment.*
- An acquaintance who is depressed wants to talk to you about his/her feelings and problems.*
- A neighbor’s fence is falling over and you have extra lumber and tools.*
- A student friend is leaving and his apartment needs to be cleaned in order to get his deposit back.*
- A family with three children has been out of work for over a year and they can’t pay their rent.*

After finishing the exercise, invite members to tell what factors influenced their responses. Ask those who said *yes* to suggest other kinds of action they might take to extend help. Brainstorm practical ways that we can lend a hand to someone to show Jesus’ love.

2. State that in today’s Bible passage we read of Nehemiah’s willingness to extend help to the people living in the city of his birth. Messengers from Judah had brought reports that Jerusalem’s walls lay in ruins.

Nehemiah was willing to help, and he prayed that God would bless his efforts to respond to the need. When he arrived in Jerusalem, what he found disturbed him. He took action. Today’s lesson challenges us to meet people’s needs as Nehemiah met people’s needs.

Guide the Study

3. Enlist a member to read Nehemiah 2:1-5 while the class listens to Nehemiah’s request. Refer to the first illustration (on the next page) to provide a visual for this discussion topic. Use questions such as these to discuss:
- Do you think Nehemiah had prepared ahead of time to talk with the king, or was he caught off guard?*
 - Does it surprise you that the king noticed a deep grief on the face of Nehemiah and responded to it with genuine concern?*
 - Why would trust be necessary between the king and a cupbearer?*
 - When the king expressed his sympathy, why would Nehemiah react with fear? (An honest answer would mean he was challenging the official policy that the walls of Jerusalem not be rebuilt. An answer like this would risk insulting the king. Remind the class of Esther’s similar fear in Lesson 14.)*
 - How did Nehemiah show tact and diplomacy when explaining to the king?*
 - When you must appeal to authority and power for sympathy, do you offer a prayer for God’s help to say the right thing?*

4. Enlist a member to read Nehemiah 5:1-13 aloud. Divide the class into small groups and tell half the groups to review the passage to identify the main problems among the people in Jerusalem. Tell the other groups to review the passage and identify the actions Nehemiah took to correct the problems. (Allow time for review, then call for reports. Make brief notes on a marker board as reports are given.)

5. As needed, add this information:

Some Jewish farmers had been forced into debt because of hard economic conditions. The creditors often were fellow Jews. Thus, Jews who had been released from captivity in Babylon were now made economic captives to other Jews on their own lands. The rich were taking advantage of the poor. Nehemiah

calmly but forcefully said this behavior among God’s people was unacceptable. He insisted on justice and fair treatment for all the people.

6. Lead the class to discuss the approach Nehemiah took in dealing with the problems.

Ask: *How might Nehemiah’s attitudes and actions have influenced other officials in the community?*

Encourage Application

7. Ask members to reflect on ways God might be challenging them to meet people’s needs as Nehemiah met people’s needs. Encourage them to examine their attitudes toward helping others to see whether there is need for growth. Close in prayer.

Supplemental Teaching Ideas Connect with Life

◆ Use this case study for discussion:

Andy was a teacher at a school in a poor area of the city. Many of his students were needy, both physically and emotionally. Andy wanted to start a Friendship Club for his students, and he requested members of his Sunday school class—all upper middle class—to help. Some members felt Andy was asking too much and refused to get involved.

Ask: *Do you see their refusal to help as unacceptable behavior for Christians? Why or why not?*

State: *Today we read about a man named Nehemiah who served the king of Persia as a cupbearer. He heard reports that the walls around Jerusalem were in ruins. He returned to Jerusalem as governor to help in rebuilding the walls. (Use the second illustration on this page as a visual for this part of the lesson.) He insisted on justice for the needy and fair treatment for all people. The lesson asks us to consider whether our attitudes and actions influence people to relate to others with kindness and fairness.*

Encourage Application

◆ Lead members to discuss:

—*Do we as Christians have an obligation to intervene in every problem we encounter?*

—*What factors should be considered in determining when to intervene? (Discussion should include the importance of having a definite leading from God.)*

Close in prayer asking God to help members to be sensitive to the Spirit’s prompting when they encounter problem situations and to be willing to respond.



Above image: *Nehemiah asking the king for permission to rebuild the wall, original source unknown*
Lower image: *Source: freebibleillustrations.com*

