

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE
TEACHER

WINTER 2024–2025
A KING FOREVER AND EVER

▶ International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

A quarterly publication of **STANDARD PUBLISHING**

WINTER 2024–2025 A KING FOREVER AND EVER

CONTRIBUTORS

Lesson Development Chad Summa (1, 3), Jon Miller (2), Doug Hoffer (4–5),
Mark Hamilton (6, 8–9), Jon Weatherly (7),
Mark S. Krause (10–11), Doug Redford (12–13)

Verbal Illustrations Laura McKillip Wood (1–2, 5), Ronald L. Nickelson (3),
Chad Summa (4), Omar Palafox (6–9), Jon Miller (10–13)

Involvement Learning Jon Miller (1–2), Andrew Wood (3–6),
Connie Chandler (7–10), Mark A. Taylor (11–13)

What Do You Think? Andrew Wood (1–13)

EDITORIAL TEAM

Jane Ann Kenney & Taylor Z. Stamps

For timely help EACH WEEK, check out www.standardlesson.com. Updated weekly!

KJV Bible Teacher is published quarterly by Standard Publishing, www.standardpub.com. Copyright © 2024 by Standard Publishing, part of the David C Cook family, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80918. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Lessons are based on the *Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching*. Copyright © 2020 Committee on the Uniform Series. Used by permission. Scripture taken from the *King James Version*.

A King

Forever and Ever

Special Features

	Page
Quarterly Quiz	114
Quarter at a Glance.....	Jon Miller 115
Get the Setting	Ronald L. Nickelson 116
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)	117
“Journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem” (Map Feature)	119
Here’s a Question . . . (Teacher Tips)	Brent L. Amato 120
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)	465
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages
In the World (weekly online feature).....	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world

Lessons

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

December 1	Jesus’ Ancestry.....	<i>Ruth 4:9-17; Luke 3:23, 31b-32</i>	121
December 8	God’s Promise	<i>2 Samuel 7:4-17</i>	129
December 15	A Father’s Prophecy	<i>Luke 1:67-80</i>	137
December 22	Savior’s Birth	<i>Luke 2:1-16</i>	145
December 29	David’s Son	<i>Luke 18:35-43</i>	153

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

January 5	The Lord Is King	<i>Psalm 10:12-18</i>	161
January 12	The Lord Is Majestic	<i>Psalm 93</i>	169
January 19	The Lord Is Active	<i>Psalm 103:1-14</i>	177
January 26	The Lord Is Righteous.....	<i>Psalm 145:1, 10-21</i>	185

Unit 3: Life in God’s Kingdom

February 2	Praying Properly.....	<i>Matthew 6:5-15</i>	193
February 9	Heeding Wholly	<i>Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24</i>	201
February 16	Living Lastly	<i>Matthew 19:16-30</i>	209
February 23	Ministering Mightily.....	<i>Matthew 25:31-46</i>	217

Quarterly Quiz

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

Lesson 1

1. The women praised the Lord because Naomi was not without a _____. *Ruth 4:14*

2. Luke states that Jesus was about 30 years old when He began His public ministry. T/F. *Luke 3:23*

Lesson 2

1. The word of the Lord came to whom? (David, Nathan, Samuel) *2 Samuel 7:4*

2. The Lord declared that David's house, kingdom, and _____ would be forever. *2 Samuel 7:16*

Lesson 3

1. "Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and _____." (prayed, prophesied, worshipped) *Luke 1:67*

2. The child would be called "the prophet of the Highest." T/F. *Luke 1:76*

Lesson 4

1. Where did Joseph begin the journey to Bethlehem? (Capernaum, Jerusalem, Nazareth) *Luke 2:4*

2. The heavenly host proclaimed "_____ to God." (Honor, Praise, Glory) *Luke 2:14*

Lesson 5

1. The blind man said, "Jesus, thou Son of David, heal me." T/F. *Luke 18:38*

2. Jesus restored the man's sight by placing mud on the man's eyes. T/F. *Luke 18:42-43*

Lesson 6

1. The psalmist asked God, "lift up thine _____." *Psalms 10:12*

2. The psalmist describes God as being a "helper of the _____." *Psalms 10:14*

Lesson 7

1. "The Lord reigneth, he is clothed with _____." *Psalms 93:1*

2. What body of water lifts its "voice" to the Lord? (rivers, lakes, floods) *Psalms 93:3*

Lesson 8

1. The Lord will renew youth like doves. T/F. *Psalms 103:5*

2. The Lord remembers that "we are _____." *Psalms 103:14*

Lesson 9

1. The Lord's dominion endures through all _____. *Psalms 145:13*

2. The psalmist states that the Lord is righteous in all what? (thoughts, actions, ways) *Psalms 145:17*

Lesson 10

1. Jesus taught that people should pray in a way that others will notice. T/F. *Matthew 6:5*

2. Jesus taught that people should pray for what kind of bread? (daily bread, bread of life, bread of heaven) *Matthew 6:11*

Lesson 11

1. Jesus described John the Baptist as "Elias," who was to come. T/F. *Matthew 11:14*

2. Jesus pronounced "woe" to what two cities? (choose two: Bethsaida, Capernaum, Chorazin, Tyre) *Matthew 11:21*

Lesson 12

1. Jesus told the young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor to have _____ in heaven. *Matthew 19:21*

2. The young man obeyed Jesus' directives regarding wealth. T/F. *Matthew 19:22*

Lesson 13

1. The Son of man will gather all _____ before His throne. *Matthew 25:32*

2. The Son of man will put sheep at His left hand and goats at His right hand. T/F. *Matthew 25:33*

Quarter at a Glance

by Jon Miller

This quarter explores the broad sweep of Scripture's teaching regarding God's reign—teaching that culminates in the proclamation of Jesus as the earthly exhibition of that kingdom. Beginning with key moments in the history of Jesus' ancestors, this quarter highlights Jesus' birth as the Son of David. The quarter then moves to a four-week study of psalms that extol the reign of God. The conclusion of the quarter provides a look at Jesus' teachings on life in God's kingdom.

Jesus, the Heir of David

The first unit of lessons prepares us for the Christmas season by introducing us to members of Jesus' lineage. Each individual in that lineage is a testament to God's faithfulness and His glorious plan for His kingdom. This royal lineage would culminate with the rule and reign of Jesus Christ.

The example of Ruth demonstrates the ways that God's plan for His kingdom defies human expectations. Even though Ruth was a Gentile (non-Jewish person), she was welcomed and loved (Ruth 4:9-17, lesson 1). Through this Gentile woman, God continued His plan for an eternal kingdom and eternal King. Her descendants were included in the genealogy of Jesus (Luke 3:31-32).

Other members of Jesus' lineage demonstrate the surprising ways that God works. King David's behavior was a mixed bag, but his "house and . . . kingdom" (2 Samuel 7:16, lesson 2) would be forever. His royal line would eventually lead to the promised Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Zacharias, a relative of Jesus who lived at the time of Jesus' birth, considered how his own son would prepare the way for Jesus. Zacharias's son, John, would become "the prophet of the Highest" and one who would "give knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:76-77, lesson 3).

The Scripture text of lesson 4 reveals the culmination of the long-awaited hope. Luke's Gospel highlights how Jesus' birth, as the heir of David, brings good news to the world—even to lowly

shepherds (Luke 2:1-16). The first unit of lessons concludes with a glimpse of Jesus, the "Son of David" (18:38, lesson 5), who bestows mercy on those in need.

Our God Reigns

The songbook of the ancient people of God, the Psalms, praises the reign of God. Through these songs, God's people find comfort in the assurance of God's reign (Psalm 10:12-18, lesson 6). He is the eternal and all-powerful King (Psalms 47, 93, lesson 7), who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (103:8, lesson 8). As such, God's people praise His righteous name for His powerful acts as ruler of an everlasting kingdom (145:10-21, lesson 9).

*Citizens of this heavenly kingdom
are called to faithful obedience
to the King.*

Life in the Kingdom

The quarter concludes with four lessons from the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus explains the nature and obligations of life in His kingdom. This manner of living consists of prayer marked with praise, petitions, and forgiveness (Matthew 6:5-15, lesson 10). Life in this kingdom will not be marked with ease. In fact, citizens of this heavenly kingdom will inevitably face resistance in this world, for "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence" (11:12, lesson 11).

Life in the kingdom will often involve reorienting expectations. When a rich young ruler sought eternal life through his good deeds, Jesus pointed him toward a more profound understanding of kingdom living (Matthew 19:16-30, lesson 12). More than anything, citizens of this heavenly kingdom are called to faithful obedience to the King, even in unexpected contexts (25:31-46, lesson 13).

Get the Setting

by Ronald L. Nickelson

Why bother reading this page? Of what practical importance is it to “get the setting”? Why “waste time” studying a setting or context that won’t change a statement’s meaning?

To answer these questions, we first need to understand that the words *context* and *setting* mean the same thing in terms of our discussion here. Another thing to realize is that *context* can be addressed in terms of two subcategories: *historical context* and *literary context*.

The Historical Context

This kind of context considers what else was going on at the time that the event or thought of the text occurred. Words are not spoken, nor do events occur, in a vacuum! The first lesson of this quarter invites special attention in this regard. Taken in isolation, the book of Ruth may seem to be little more than a quaint love story that revolves around curious cultural practices. But the text takes on a certain sharpness when considering its historical context is the dreary period of the judges.

Spanning roughly the years 1380–1050 BC, the era of the judges was a time when “there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). The book of Ruth, then, is a countercultural story in that the characters in the story go to appropriate lengths to make sure to do the right thing in *everyone’s* eyes. The book self-testifies to its place in history, being an account of the great-grandparents of David, whose descendant Jesus would reign as King forever.

The historical settings in the lesson texts of this quarter are both continuous and discontinuous with that of the book of Ruth. Elements of continuity are the facts of sin, foreign oppression, and a persistent emphasis on King David. Elements of discontinuity across our 13 lessons include a shift in perspective from the old covenant to the new covenant, a change from an expected Messiah

to the advent of the Messiah, and the presence of clearly delineated power structures within Israel.

The Literary Context

This subcategory of context investigates the kind of literature in which the text appears. Is it parable? sarcasm? apocalyptic? history? poetry? There are other categories, but you get the picture.

Each type of literature has its own distinctive recurring characteristics and, therefore, distinctive guidelines for interpretation as the original author intended for the text. Parables use fictional elements to stress important real-life points (examples: Jesus’ parables). In sarcasm, the writer means the opposite of what he or she is saying (example: Isaiah 47:12). Apocalyptic literature includes content on ultimate realities (example: Mark 13).

History is the type of literature for lessons of units 1 and 3 for this quarter. The authors intended these texts to be understood as having really happened to real people at a real time in history. (Note: this use of the word *history* is an issue of “what happened,” while the issue of historical context, previously discussed, is an issue of “when it happened.”)

Poetry is the type of literature in the four lessons of unit 2. This literature draws out emotion from its audience, but that doesn’t mean the poetry is fictional. An example is Psalm 93:2 from lesson 7: “Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.” The poetry elicits the emotion of wonder from the reader. One way that poetry achieves this is through the use of synonymous parallelism, the practice of stating a singular thought—not two thoughts—expressed by two synonymous lines.

Bible Reality

Without any awareness of historical or literary context, even children can pick up a Bible and learn eternal truths. We can do so as well. But if we are ignorant of historical and literary contexts, we won’t reach the level of spiritual maturity that we should.

Mon, Feb. 10 **God Is Generous to All** Matthew 20:1-16
 Tue, Feb. 11 **Those Who Are Generous Are Blessed** Proverbs 22:1-9
 Wed, Feb. 12 **Blessings and Woes** Luke 6:20-26
 Thu, Feb. 13 **Be Rich in Good Works** 1 Timothy 6:17-21
 Fri, Feb. 14 **God Sets All Things Right** 1 Samuel 2:1-10
 Sat, Feb. 15 **God Lifts Up the Poor** Psalm 113
 Sun, Feb. 16 **All Things Are Possible with God** Matthew 19:16-30
 Mon, Feb. 17 **Equipped for Every Good Work** 2 Timothy 3:10-17
 Tue, Feb. 18 **Delight in God's Ways** Psalm 119:17-24
 Wed, Feb. 19 **The Bridegroom Is Coming** Matthew 25:1-13
 Thu, Feb. 20 **Praise for a Faithful Servant** Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30
 Fri, Feb. 21 **Choose the Way of Faithfulness** Matthew 119:41-48
 Sat, Feb. 22 **The Fast That God Chooses** Psalm 119:41-48
 Sun, Feb. 23 **Compassion for the Least** Isaiah 58
 Matthew 25:31-46

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 114

Lesson 1—1. kinsman. 2. True. **Lesson 2**—1. Nathan. 2. throne. **Lesson 3**—1. prophesied. 2. True. **Lesson 4**—1. Nazareth. 2. Glory. **Lesson 5**—1. False. 2. False. **Lesson 6**—1. hand. 2. fatherless. **Lesson 7**—1. majesty. 2. floods. **Lesson 8**—1. False. 2. dust. **Lesson 9**—1. generations. 2. ways. **Lesson 10**—1. False. 2. daily bread. **Lesson 11**—1. True. 2. Chorazin, Bethsaida. **Lesson 12**—1. treasure. 2. False. **Lesson 13**—1. nations. 2. False.

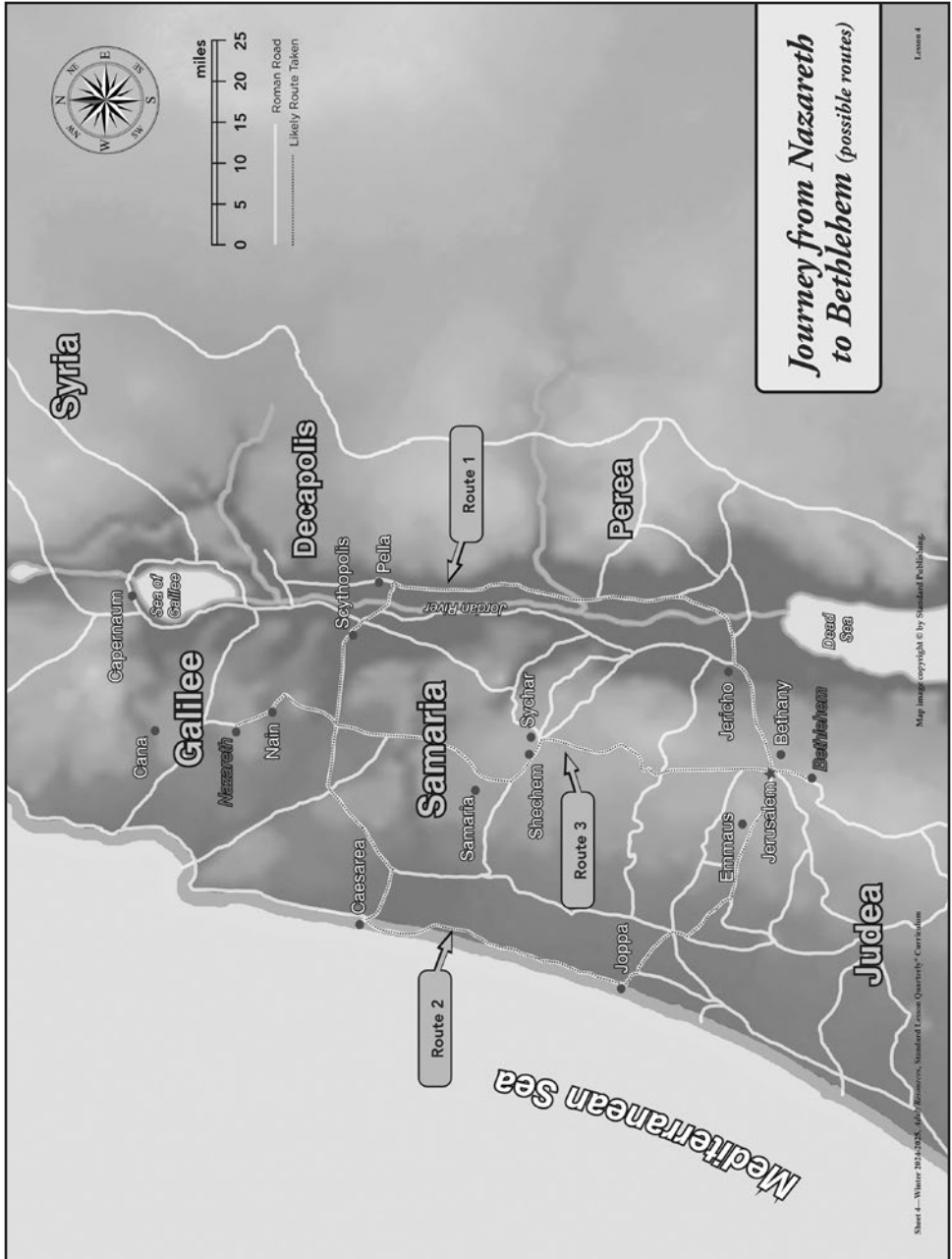
This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Nov. 25	The Son of God	Luke 3:23-38
Tue, Nov. 26	A Household Built by God	Psalm 128
Wed, Nov. 27	Determined Loyalty	Ruth 1:1, 3, 6-18
Thu, Nov. 28	An Act of Kindness	Ruth 2:1-3, 17-23
Fri, Nov. 29	More than DNA	Matthew 12:46-50
Sat, Nov. 30	Daring Faith	Ruth 3:1-13
Sun, Dec. 1	God Has Not Abandoned You	Ruth 4:9-17
Mon, Dec. 2	The Lord Looks on the Heart	1 Samuel 16:1-13
Tue, Dec. 3	A Shepherd for God's People	2 Samuel 5:1-10
Wed, Dec. 4	Christ's Unending Reign	Luke 1:26-38
Thu, Dec. 5	God Defends the Anointed	Psalm 2
Fri, Dec. 6	Endless Peace for David's Throne	Isaiah 9:1-7
Sat, Dec. 7	The Son of David	Romans 1:1-7
Sun, Dec. 8	An Everlasting Kingdom	2 Samuel 7:4-17
Mon, Dec. 9	God's Covenant of Love	Psalm 89:1-4, 27-37
Tue, Dec. 10	God Has Heard Your Prayer	Luke 1:5-17
Wed, Dec. 11	A Message of Promise and Grace	Luke 1:18-23
Thu, Dec. 12	The Lord God Is a Sun and Shield	Psalm 84
Fri, Dec. 13	The Herald of God's Coming	Malachi 4
Sat, Dec. 14	A Child of Wonder	Luke 1:57-66
Sun, Dec. 15	Praises to the God Who Saves	Luke 1:67-80

Mon, Dec. 16 **The Coming King of Peace** Isaiah 11:1-9
 Tue, Dec. 17 **God Is Doing a New Thing** Isaiah 43:14-21
 Wed, Dec. 18 **We Are the Clay; God Is the Potter** Isaiah 64
 Thu, Dec. 19 **A Great and Peaceful King** Micah 5:1-6
 Fri, Dec. 20 **The Word Became Flesh** John 1:1-5, 9-14, 16-18
 Sat, Dec. 21 **The Son Is King! Worship Him!** Hebrews 1
 Sun, Dec. 22 **Christ Is Born! Glorify Him!** Luke 2:1-16
 Mon, Dec. 23 **Mercy for Those Who Suffer** Luke 4:14-21
 Tue, Dec. 24 **Show God's Mercy to All** Luke 6:27-36
 Wed, Dec. 25 **God Delights in Compassion** Micah 7:14-20
 Thu, Dec. 26 **Remember Your Mercy, O Lord** Psalm 25:1-10
 Fri, Dec. 27 **God Relieves a Troubled Heart** Psalm 25:11-22
 Sat, Dec. 28 **Mercy for Sinners** Luke 18:9-14
 Sun, Dec. 29 **Lord, Let Me See Again** Luke 18:35-43
 Mon, Dec. 30 **The Kingdom of the Messiah** Revelation 11:14-19
 Tue, Dec. 31 **A Heart Full of Thanks** Psalm 9:1-9
 Wed, Jan. 1 **A Plea to God for Grace** Psalm 9:10-20
 Thu, Jan. 2 **The King Immortal and Invisible** 1 Timothy 1:12-17
 Fri, Jan. 3 **The Life of Faith** 1 Timothy 6:11-16
 Sat, Jan. 4 **The Pridelful and Arrogant** Psalm 10:1-11
 Sun, Jan. 5 **God Will Arise and Hear Us** Psalm 10:12-18
 Mon, Jan. 6 **Faithful and True** Revelation 19:11-21
 Tue, Jan. 7 **God Makes Great and Gives Strength**
 1 Chronicles 29:10-20
 Wed, Jan. 8 **Our God Reigns** Isaiah 52:1-12
 Thu, Jan. 9 **Shout Joyfully to God** Psalm 47
 Fri, Jan. 10 **Exalted Through Obedience** Philippians 2:1-13
 Sat, Jan. 11 **The Wind and Waves Obey Jesus** Mark 4:35-41
 Sun, Jan. 12 **Robbed in Majesty** Psalm 93

Mon, Jan. 13 **God's Heavenly Throne** Revelation 4
 Tue, Jan. 14 **Life Springs from God's Throne** Revelation 22:1-14
 Wed, Jan. 15 **My Eyes Have Seen the King** Isaiah 6:1-8
 Thu, Jan. 16 **Draw Near to God in Humility** James 4:1-10
 Fri, Jan. 17 **Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace** Hebrews 4:11-16
 Sat, Jan. 18 **Heaven Is God's Throne** Isaiah 66:1-14
 Sun, Jan. 19 **Bless God's Holy Name** Psalm 103:1-11, 19-22
 Mon, Jan. 20 **The Kingdoms of This World** Daniel 2:31-45
 Tue, Jan. 21 **The Kingdom of God's Son** Colossians 1:9-20
 Wed, Jan. 22 **Christ in You, the Hope of Glory** Colossians 1:21-29
 Thu, Jan. 23 **The Lord Reigns over the Earth**
 Zechariah 14:8-11, 16-21
 Fri, Jan. 24 **An Unshakable Kingdom** Hebrews 12:18-29
 Sat, Jan. 25 **Seek First God's Kingdom** Matthew 6:25-34
 Sun, Jan. 26 **Bless God's Name Forever** Psalm 145:1-10, 17-21
 Mon, Jan. 27 **Come, All Who Are Weary** Matthew 11:25-30
 Tue, Jan. 28 **God, Answer Me When I Call** Psalm 4
 Wed, Jan. 29 **Cry Out for Justice** Luke 18:1-8
 Thu, Jan. 30 **Pray for One Another** James 5:13-20
 Fri, Jan. 31 **God Is My Refuge and Fortress** Psalm 91
 Sat, Feb. 1 **God Will Deliver You** Psalm 92
 Sun, Feb. 2 **The Prayer That Jesus Taught** Matthew 6:5-15
 Mon, Feb. 3 **Be Strong and Courageous** Joshua 1:1-9
 Tue, Feb. 4 **As Sheep Among Wolves** Matthew 10:16-31
 Wed, Feb. 5 **Resistance and Reward** Matthew 10:32-42
 Thu, Feb. 6 **God Is Our Salvation** Psalm 35:1-14
 Fri, Feb. 7 **Rescue Me from My Enemies** Psalm 35:15-28
 Sat, Feb. 8 **Don't Rejoice When Enemies Fall** Proverbs 24:8-22
 Sun, Feb. 9 **The Kingdom Presses On** Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24

Map Feature



“Here’s a Question . . .”

Teacher Tips by Brent L. Amato

After decades studying teachers, I have observed that the most popular teaching method is lecture. Yet, often, it is the least effective method. I’ve heard it said that “It’s not what’s taught, but what is caught.” Therefore, how do you determine if your students are connecting with you and learning from your teaching? Questions are part of the answer!

Before we dig into the *what*, *which*, and *how* of questions, remember that every lesson must answer two overarching questions. The first is “So what?” Nothing may be “caught” unless learners see relevancy! The second question is “Now what?” Your ability to demonstrate the significance of the lesson material will help the students move toward a response. Without it, nothing might change!

What Is Communicated

What can questions communicate to your students about you? First, questions show that your focus is on the students. Learners understand that you came to class prepared and with them on your mind. How often do we teachers get consumed by our teaching and our lessons? You might find yourself so enthused about a Lesson Context that you forget to tailor your lesson to your students’ needs. By taking time to prepare questions, you communicate to your students that they’re important and they count for more than attendance. Good questions show you’re sincerely glad the students attended and maybe even that they are appreciated.

During a particular class, a student may want nothing more than for someone to pay positive attention to him or her. Asking good questions is an effective tool to draw out the less vocal, energize the disinterested, direct the disruptive, and affirm all the students you teach.

Which Questions to Use and Not Use

Some questions are more effective than others. Less effective questions are closed (requiring only a yes/no or brief answer), overly complex, vague,

“leading” (based on a hidden or not-so-hidden agenda of the teacher), confusing, or insignificant (detracting from the main idea of the lesson). Such questions may stifle the learning process.

Well-designed questions, with no “pat” answers, stimulate thought. Better questions are often application-oriented; that is the direction taken by the five discussion questions you see in each lesson of this commentary. Good questions take time to develop, so they should be prepared in advance.

How They Help

Questions were a large part of Jesus’ teaching style. What can we learn from Him? Jesus, the master teacher, used questions to determine desires (John 5:6), stimulate thinking (Luke 9:25), restore a relationship (John 21:15-17), challenge customs (Matthew 15:3), and encourage faith (Mark 4:40). Are you doing this in your classroom with the questions you use?

Jesus also used sequential questions to clarify attitudes. Consider these: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? . . . But whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:13, 15). These simple yet profound questions helped the disciples move beyond public opinion to personal confession.

Further Questions

But I’m sure you still have questions about questions. How do “declarations of truth” fit with questions? You need both. How long should you wait in silence for an answer to your question? For adults, 60 seconds (maintaining eye contact and restating the question, if necessary). If no answer is given, should you answer it? Try not to. Can you answer a question with a question? Why not? Should you always allow time for questions? Yes.

If there are no further questions, start preparing to ask some good ones. Then watch what happens to your relationships with your students, to class interaction, and to “what is caught”!

Jesus' Ancestry

Devotional Reading: Galatians 4:1-7
Background Scripture: Ruth 1-4; Luke 3:23-38

Ruth 4:9-17

9 And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10 Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place. Ye are witnesses this day.

11 And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel, and do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Bethlehem.

12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife. And when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee

this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age. For thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Luke 3:23, 31b-32

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli.

31b Which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,

32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson.

Key Text

The women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. —Ruth 4:17

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Name individuals in the ancestry of Jesus.
2. Explain the importance of that ancestry.
3. Sketch a spiritual “family tree.”

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Grafted In
- B. Lesson Context

I. Naomi’s Family (Ruth 4:9-17)

- A. Boaz Acts (vv. 9-10)

Surprising Reward

- B. The People Bless (vv. 11-12)
- C. The Lord Blesses (vv. 13-17)

II. Jesus’ Family (Luke 3:23, 31b-32)

- A. Near Ancestors (v. 23)
- B. Distant Ancestors (vv. 31b-32)

Lost to History

Conclusion

- A. God’s Faithfulness in Family
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Grafted In

Some years ago, my wife and I researched various ways to use our 12 acres of land to make supplemental income. We considered growing chestnuts, partly because they grow well in our climate. As part of the process of learning about this possibility, we went to a seminar about grafting. Grafting is a process in which a branch of one tree adheres to a rootstock of another tree of the same general type. The process is intended to benefit both the grafted branch and the rootstock tree.

In today’s account, we focus on a particular point in the genealogy of Jesus, a “grafting in” of sorts. This addition to the family tree yielded abundant blessings, and it continues to bless.

B. Lesson Context

Almost nothing can definitively be said about the date or author of the book of Ruth. But the lack of attribution need not hinder our understanding of the book or our text today (Ruth 4:9-17). The events recounted in the book of Ruth took place in the period of the judges in Israel (1389–1050 BC; Ruth 1:1). This time in Israel’s history was marked by the people’s recurring failure to keep their covenant with the Lord (Judges 2:10-13; 3:7, 12; 4:1; etc.). In contrast to the disheartening accounts in Judges, Ruth tells the story of a handful of people living in faithful obedience to God.

The book of Ruth culminates in a genealogy of David (Ruth 4:18-22). Genealogies are found in literature from around the ancient Near East. Many of these examples recount a ruler’s lineage and were intended to legitimize a monarch’s reign. This function of genealogy hints at one reason the book of Ruth was written: to show God’s providence at work in King David’s ancestors, whether during or shortly after his kingship, or even after Israel was divided in two. Tracing Jesus’ lineage to David in Luke’s genealogy, covered in part below (see Luke 3:23-38), answered an important question: What right had Jesus to claim to be the king in Israel who fulfilled God’s promise to David? How could Jesus be the Messiah? For more con-

text on the book of Luke, see lessons 3–5 of this quarter.

I. Naomi's Family

(Ruth 4:9-17)

Having come to Bethlehem as widows, Naomi and her foreign-born daughter-in-law Ruth faced an uncertain future. But Ruth's character and hard work won her favor with Boaz, a relative of Naomi's. Events came to a quick climax: Naomi had a plan to enlist Boaz's help (Ruth 3:9-13), and Boaz wasted no time putting his own plan into action (4:1-8). (For more context, read the entirety of Ruth 1–4.)

A. Boaz Acts (vv. 9-10)

9. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

Boaz's desire was to redeem Naomi's land holdings and to marry Ruth. The laws regarding selling a family property are found in Leviticus 25:25-34 (compare Jeremiah 32:7). The gist of the regulation was that a sale of Israelite land was more of a lease since the land would return to the sellers' family when they could afford to redeem it or, at the latest, in the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 27:16-25). Because of the importance of land in Israel, the bias was to sell the property within a tribe to keep it in the extended family. For this reason, the family member who purchased the



Visual for Lesson 1. Allow learners one minute to pray for their families, both physical and spiritual, that God's will be done for and through them.

land was called a kinsman or kinsman-redeemer. And though property was generally inherited from father to son, there was precedent for a woman's holding land (see Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12).

When a nearer kinsman abdicated his right to buy the land (and marry Ruth), *Boaz* stepped in (Ruth 4:1-6). In doing so, he took on the role of a kinsman for *Naomi* by buying the land that had belonged to her husband, Elimelech, and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion. At least ten *elders* were present (4:2), along with many *people*. *Witnesses* at this time served much like an oral form of a notary public for such transactions.

10. Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place. Ye are witnesses this day.

This is the first time we learn that *Ruth* had been *the wife of Mahlon* (not Chilion); this identification was likely due to the legal nature of the proceedings. Boaz repeated the phrase, “Ye are witnesses this day,” identically worded as in Ruth 4:9 (above), creating bookends that open and close his formal, legal argument. There would be no doubt in the future that Boaz acted with integrity in redeeming the land or marrying Ruth.

The language around marrying Ruth is like that of levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; see commentary on Ruth 4:10, below). But a few

How to Say It

Boaz	<i>Bo-az.</i>
Chilion	<i>Kil-ee-on.</i>
Elimelech	<i>Ee-lim-eh-leck.</i>
Ephratah	<i>Ef-rah-tah.</i>
Heli	<i>Hee-lie.</i>
levirate	<i>leh-vuh-rut.</i>
Mahlon	<i>Mah-lon.</i>
Naasson	<i>Nah-sahn.</i>
Pharez	<i>Fair-ezz.</i>
Zarah	<i>Zair-uh.</i>

details prevent its exact characterization as such. First, *Ruth* was a *Moabitess*, not an Israelite. The two people groups, though related (see Genesis 19), were often at odds with each other (examples: Numbers 22–25; Judges 3). God had even barred Moabites from being grafted into Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3)!

Second, Boaz was not a surviving brother of the deceased husband. He wasn't even Naomi's closest kinsman. Third, the kinsman who Boaz approached as first in line was not publicly shamed (as levirate law required) for declining to marry Ruth and redeem the land as a packaged deal.

This unnamed man serves as a foil to Boaz. The man acted in keeping with conventional wisdom and was not reprimanded for doing so (as had Orpah; see Ruth 1:11-14). In contrast, Boaz exhibited extraordinary integrity in his zeal to provide for Naomi and Ruth (as had Ruth; see 1:16-18). He honored the spirit of the levirate law with his concern for Mahlon's family line (*that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place*). The first child born to Boaz and Ruth would be raised as Mahlon's child with his inheritance so that the dead man's name and property would be maintained (compare 2 Samuel 18:18; Isaiah 56:4-5). By using the language of acquiring both land and a wife (unusual language for marriage), Boaz combined in principle the levirate law with the kinsman-redeemer concept.

What Do You Think?

What are some practical ways believers can honor the dead appropriately?

Digging Deeper

How do these practices set Christian practice apart from worldly ways?

Surprising Reward

Dianne Gordon was walking to work one cold Michigan morning when she stopped at a gas station to warm up. She had made the same 2.7-mile journey both ways every day since her car broke down a year before. When Dianne noticed a bag of cash lying in the station's parking lot, she

immediately called the police. Police found nearly \$15,000 and wedding cards addressed to a newlywed couple to whom the money was returned. Despite her great need, Dianne said she never even considered not turning in the cash. She just knew turning it in was the right thing to do.

When a community member heard of Dianne's selfless act, she set up a GoFundMe page to raise enough money for Dianne to purchase a vehicle. They met their goal with plenty to spare. Dianne had expected no reward for her selfless act and yet received it.

Boaz's decision to marry Ruth led to a blessing for him: he was included in the genealogy of Jesus. How might choices you make today benefit physical or spiritual descendants you will never know (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4)? —L. M. W.

B. The People Bless (vv. 11-12)

11. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel, and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem.

This all took place at the city *gate*, the typical meeting place in Israel for legal proceedings (example: Joshua 20:4). Going above and beyond their role as *witnesses*, the people pronounced a blessing on Boaz and the new household that was forming. The blessing clearly focuses on Ruth (*the woman*), as a blessing for Boaz would more likely call for the Lord to make Boaz like Jacob. *Rachel* and *Leah* (and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah) bore the ancestors of the tribes of *Israel* (Genesis 29–30). To *do worthily* and *be famous* are blessings for wealth and a good name. The name probably assumed the couple would require children to experience these blessings (see Luke 3:32, below).

Ephratah seems to be an old name for the area of Bethlehem, also spelled “Ephrath” (example: Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7), most famously mentioned in the messianic passage of Micah 5:2 (quoted in Matthew 2:6). Rachel especially was associated with the area, as she was buried near *Bethlehem* (Genesis 35:16-19).

Though Ruth was a Moabite, she was also known to be a woman of great character (Ruth 3:11). She left behind her own people because of her love for Naomi and the Lord without knowing what reception she could expect in Naomi's home. The blessing from the people confirms their acceptance of her and hints at the Lord's pleasure with her (see 4:13, below).

What Do You Think?

What responsibilities do witnesses today have toward the newly wed? How long do those responsibilities last?

Digging Deeper

How should those responsibilities be translated to care for unmarried people?

12. And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.

The account of Pharez's birth is found in Genesis 38. *Tamar* was entitled to a levirate marriage when her husband, Er, died (Genesis 38:8). But several failures found Tamar back in her father's house with no prospect of continuing her dead husband's lineage. When she tricked *Judah* into sleeping with her, Tamar conceived *Pharez* and his twin brother, Zarah. Ruth's situation was not identical, but it is notable that both Tamar and Ruth were foreign women who became ancestors to Jesus (Matthew 1:3, 5).

What Do You Think?

In what ways are children blessings in their communities?

Digging Deeper

How can faithful people avoid the trap of valuing parenthood above childlessness?

C. The Lord Blesses (vv. 13-17)

13. So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.

It is unclear why *Ruth* did not bear children

in her first marriage, which lasted approximately ten years (Ruth 1:4). In hindsight, however, we might sense God's invisible hand preparing her for this moment. The Lord's aid in her conceiving *a son* emphasizes His blessing of this union, even though historically, the Moabites were not to have any portion in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

What Do You Think?

When has hindsight been beneficial in discerning blessings in your life?

Digging Deeper

What dangers are there in focusing too much on the past?

14. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.

Verses 14-17 focus on *Naomi*, Ruth's mother-in-law. *The women* of the town had previously witnessed Naomi's heartbreaking return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19-20). Naomi concluded that the Lord had left her bitter and empty at the death of her husband and sons (1:20-21); the reality was that God provided for Naomi even when all hope seemed lost. This was a great reversal for Naomi. *Blessed be the Lord* acknowledges His action, especially that this action reveals His loving character.

15. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age. For thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

In Israel, grown children were expected to take care of their aging parents (1 Timothy 5:4). This was especially true if their mother was widowed, as women had very few financial resources to fall back on if family could not help. Following the death of her husband and sons, Naomi's future was much in doubt. With the birth of *a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age*, Naomi need not be burdened about her future.

Even as the women celebrated this grandson, Ruth was extolled as being *better to thee than seven sons*. This is quite incredible, given the status

a hypothetical mother of seven sons would enjoy in Israel! Those sons represented security in the future (especially in widowhood) and the hope of accrued wealth.

16-17. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

It was not uncommon for well-off families (as Boaz's seems to have been) to have nurses for their children. In Naomi's case, the role is not that of a wet nurse but as a guardian and caretaker (compare Genesis 24:59; 35:8). An informal adoption might be in view.

This is the only place in the Bible where *neighbours* are said to have named a baby (contrast Luke 1:59-63). Ironically, there is no evidence to suggest that these same women honored Naomi's request to be called by a new name (Ruth 1:20). The name *Obed* means "worshipper" or "servant," the latter meaning lending itself to the idea that he would serve as a redeemer for Naomi one day. That "his name [became] famous in Israel" (4:14) came to pass through his son, *Jesse*, who became the father of the greatest earthly king to reign in Israel, *David*.

II. Jesus' Family

(Luke 3:23, 31b-32)

Over 1,000 years passed between the events recorded in Ruth and the time of Jesus' birth. As one would expect, much changed over the passing generations: the Davidic kingdom rose, split, and then collapsed in exile. The people had returned to the land, but the kingship had not been restored. What of God's promises of an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7)?

A. Near Ancestors (v. 23)

23. And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli.

A Levite could begin serving in the tabernacle at *thirty years of age* (Numbers 4:3), although

other texts reflect ages beginning at 20 (1 Chronicles 23:24; 2 Chronicles 31:17; Ezra 3:8) or 25 years old (Numbers 8:24-25). These differences could reflect the variety of roles that were available at these ages, new age limits set in the temple rather than in the tabernacle, or changing supply and demand in demographics. In any case, Jesus' age certainly would have qualified Him to minister in the temple.

Luke adds the editorial comment that it *was supposed* that Jesus was *the son of Joseph* in order to be clear that, in reality, Jesus is God's Son. But Joseph was legally Jesus' father. Many scholars believe that Luke's genealogy reflects a family tree traced through Mary, such that Joseph was the son-in-law of *Heli*. Or it could be that Matthew traces through Mary's family and Luke through Joseph's. Other proposals for the differences have also been put forward. Nonetheless, we need not be perturbed by the differences between Matthew and Luke (see Matthew 1:1-16; see commentary on Luke 3:31b, below). We also do well to remember that the ancient genealogy was not intended to be a complete accounting of a family. Neither account needs to be taken as mistaken or corrected against the other.

What follows in Luke 3:24-31a (not in our printed text) are generations from Matthat to Mattatha.

B. Distant Ancestors (vv. 31b-32)

31b. Which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David.

Nathan was a *son of David* by "Bathshua" (Bathsheba; 1 Chronicles 3:5). The Gospel of Matthew traces Jesus' line through Solomon rather than Nathan (Matthew 1:6). Undoubtedly, what was most important to both writers was showing that Jesus can trace His earthly lineage straight back to *David*. This relationship was the key to Jesus' being able to fulfill the promise that God made to David: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

32. Which was the son of Jesse, which was

the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson.

This verse brings us back to the story of Ruth (see Ruth 4:17, above). *Jesse* was David's father, *Obed* his grandfather, and so on. Some names are probably omitted here, as *Booz* likely lived near the end of the time of the judges (about 1100 BC), whereas *Salmon* (see Matthew 1:5) lived during the initial days of conquest in the promised land (about 1400 BC). *Naasson* was the tribal leader of Judah during the wilderness period (see Numbers 1:4, 7).

What Do You Think?

What influence has your family of origin had on your adult life?

Digging Deeper

Does this influence deserve celebration or require redemption? What encouragement can you take from Jesus' family line in this regard?

Lost to History

My mother recently gave me a box full of old family photos. Looking through them, she could identify many faces. However, we found several photos of people we had never seen before. I'm sure my grandmother would have known them, but she passed away years ago. Most of her generation is gone, and no one today remembers the identities or stories of those people in the photos.

Despite this, I know something about those people. Their genetics and their choices have helped create me. I may not know their names, but I see a familial resemblance. I may not know their biographies, but I know they valued faith and taught their children to do the same, just as I do.

Jesus' family tree is detailed and extensive, full of names. No doubt, some family members' stories were not retained. But those people affected Jesus' life, nonetheless. How does knowing that your decisions affect future generations, physical and spiritual, influence how you live today?

—L. M. W.

Conclusion

A. God's Faithfulness in Family

The story of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi should be a great encouragement to us. Each chose to follow the Lord faithfully, as seen through their righteous actions. As a result of their faithful deeds and God's faithfulness to their family, all three received blessings. First, their community responded positively to this family's outstanding character. This was not a foregone conclusion, especially for the foreign woman Ruth. Second and more importantly, we see how God chose to bless the family's faithful actions in their own times with a son. Truly, the Lord had turned their mourning into dancing (Psalm 30:11)!

The blessing continued beyond what Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi experienced for themselves. Israel was blessed by David, the future king, and much further in the future with Jesus, the promised King. This family could never anticipate how their faithfulness would echo through the generations and what a blessing their own blessings would be to the world. We are blessed today to see how God can work through us and for us when we choose to follow Him. But the greatest blessing, of course, is living in the Kingdom of God thanks to the sacrifice of our King.

B. Prayer

Lord, we are awed by the story of the faith of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, and how You turned their blessing into a blessing for Israel and then the world. We praise You for the righteous acts of many that finally brought us to the person and work of Christ. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's faithfulness resounds through generations.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 123) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. Order ISBN 9780784739631 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Give learners one minute to read the genealogy in Luke 3:23-38. While they read, distribute blank pieces of paper. After the minute is up, have learners pair up. Then, give them one minute to list as many names from the genealogy as possible. At the end of the minute, ask the pairs to grade their list against Luke's genealogy. They should strike out any names that do not appear in Luke's genealogy (even if they are present in Matthew's). After they have checked these answers, ask learners to identify with stars which names in Luke 3:23-38 can also be found in Ruth without consulting Ruth 4. (*Answers:* Obed, Jesse, David (Ruth 4:17; Luke 3:31b-32), and Boaz/Booz (Ruth 4:13; Luke 3:32).)

Lead into the studying by saying, "As we dive into our lesson today, we will see the importance of lineage and legacy within the Bible, particularly in the books of Ruth and Luke."

Into the Word

Ask the class to work together to summarize what has happened in Ruth 1:1-4:8. Consult the Lesson Context for this lesson and the Bible text as desired. *Option.* Prepare a lecture on this context or assign it before class to a volunteer. *Alternative.* Have learners pair up to complete the "Setting the Scene" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. After several minutes, bring the class back together to fill in any remaining gaps.

Ask for volunteers to read Ruth 4:9-17 aloud. Distribute a handout (you prepare) with the text printed. As learners read along, have them mark anything puzzling with a question mark, anything that seems important with a star, and anything that stands out in some other way by underlining it. Use the commentary to help answer the questions learners might have about the text. Then, have them discuss in small groups what they starred and underlined.

After some discussion, divide the class into four groups: **Boaz, Naomi, Ruth, and The Witnesses.** Have these groups work together to detail the words and actions of their assigned person or group. Then, groups should answer two questions about the subject of their groups: 1-How did this person or group act righteously? 2-What conclusions did or might this person or group make about the Lord's action in this story? Answers will vary to some degree in answer to both questions, but in general, righteousness is demonstrated by honoring God's law, and we could expect that all these people assumed that God had worked to bring these events to their conclusion so He could bless the parties involved.

Lead into the text on Jesus' genealogy by briefly summarizing what happened between Ruth's lifetime and Jesus' birth.

Have a volunteer read Luke 3:23, 31b-32. Ask the class to compare the purpose(s) of the brief genealogy in Ruth 4 to the purpose(s) of the genealogy in Luke 3. Expect to hear at least something along the lines of the genealogies emphasizing God's providence at work in the family and serving to prove the legitimacy of the king (David in Ruth, Jesus in Luke).

Into Life

Have learners work in small groups to compare what we know of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi's character with Christ. Ask, "What family resemblances do we find?" Based on those answers, ask learners to work alone for one minute jotting down their own characteristics that speak to a family resemblance with these four people.

Alternative. Instruct the learners to complete the "A Spiritual Family Tree" exercise as directed.

Once finished with either activity, provide a few minutes for reflection before concluding with a prayer thanking God for His generations-long work bringing Jesus into the world.

God's Promise

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 9:1-7
Background Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-17

2 Samuel 7:4-17

4 And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,

5 Go and tell my servant David, thus saith the LORD, shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel.

9 And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no

more. Neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime.

11 And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever.

17 According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

Key Text

Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever. —2 Samuel 7:16

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize David's intent and God's response.
2. Explain the differing senses of the use of the word *house*.
3. Write a prayer for obedience to God, even when His plans differ from human plans.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Temporary Dwellings
- B. Lesson Context

I. History Lessons (2 Samuel 7:4-9a)

- A. Israel's Past (vv. 4-7)
- B. David's Past (vv. 8-9a)

II. Future Plans (2 Samuel 7:9b-17)

- A. David and Israel (vv. 9b-11a)
Legacy of Faith
- B. Solomon and Christ (vv. 11b-17)
A Grandmother's Faith

Conclusion

- A. Eternal Home
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Temporary Dwellings

Twelve years ago, my wife and I moved to a remote town in western Alaska. The area where we spent the first decade of our Alaskan journey was accessible only by boat or plane. Besides our town, 89 smaller villages are located in western Alaska off the road system. Many of these communities are near rivers, providing more accessible summer transportation and an abundant supply of salmon.

One distinctive aspect of life in this region is that homes are constructed on permafrost, a frozen layer of soil. Due to the thawing permafrost and harsh weather conditions, these houses require more upkeep than those built in the contiguous United States. In Newtok, a small Alaskan village, erosion and deterioration became so severe that the entire community had to be relocated to higher ground, away from the river. Many villagers witnessed the river slowly eat away at their homes until it finally engulfed entire structures. The homes we construct are temporary.

In King David's mind, the time for the Lord to live in a tent (the tabernacle) was officially over (2 Samuel 7:1-2). What followed the king's decision would be much different than he anticipated.

B. Lesson Context

David ultimately became king over a united Israel. This happened approximately 1000 BC (2 Samuel 5–6). After a long civil war (3:1-2) and the conquering of the Jebusites and their city of Jerusalem (5:6-7), he made that city the capital of the reunited kingdom of Israel (5:8-12). Victory over the Philistines followed (5:17-25). After that, David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (also known as “the city of David” [6:16]) and placed it inside a tent (6:17). This move cemented Jerusalem as both the political and religious capital of the kingdom.

After the ark's arrival in Jerusalem, David confronted what he considered to be a grave disparity. Although he dwelled in a grand palace (2 Samuel 5:11; 7:2), no permanent abode existed

for the ark of the covenant (7:6-7, below). Disturbed by this state of affairs, David decided to build a house for God. David communicated his plan to the prophet Nathan, who initially offered encouragement and approval for the king to proceed (7:1-3, not in our lesson text). Apparently, neither man had asked God for His approval, and what follows in chapter 7 was God's reaction to the plan (1 Chronicles 17:3-15 is a parallel account).

I. History Lessons

(2 Samuel 7:4-9a)

A. Israel's Past (vv. 4-7)

4. And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying.

Unlike God's direct communication with King Solomon later (1 Kings 3:5), God chose to speak to David indirectly through *Nathan* the prophet. The reason for this difference is a matter of speculation. But perhaps the prophet also needed the forthcoming corrective himself since he had encouraged David in his wrong thinking (2 Samuel 7:3).

The prophet would later risk David's wrath by confronting the king regarding David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 12). Nathan would also anoint Solomon as David's successor (1 Kings 1:34).

5. Go and tell my servant David, thus saith the LORD, shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

With this verse, God's corrective begins. The issue at hand seems to be not one of disobedience but rather one of presumption. Has *David*, God's *servant*, presumed that he would be doing God a favor?

6. Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

For God to have the kind of house that David desired to build was never high on God's list of priorities. To this point, the tabernacle, as prescribed by God to Moses centuries earlier, had sufficed (Exodus 26). At the future dedication of the

temple, David's son Solomon will cite the words of the verse before us (see 1 Kings 8:16). He will note in the same verse that while God was not concerned about choosing a city in which to dwell, He was concerned about choosing a person. This is what the Lord addressed in the next part of His message.

7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

God had never required a permanent structure for His dwelling place in *Israel*, let alone a grand one as *an house of cedar* would surely be (compare 2 Samuel 5:11).

God's faithfulness to His people had always far exceeded their faithfulness to Him. Yet God had not called on anyone to respond by building *an house of cedar* (a temple) as a visual aid (or anything else) to influence their faithfulness. The term translated *tribes* probably refers to tribal leaders.

What Do You Think?

What questions should a congregation ask when discerning how to steward a house of worship?

Digging Deeper

What sorts of answers might suggest that a congregation should choose a different course regarding a place of worship?

B. David's Past (vv. 8-9a)

8-9a. Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel. And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight.

The image of shepherd-leadership echoes throughout the passage as God reminded *David* of that man's own history. God had sent the prophet Samuel to Jesse's family in the small

village of Bethlehem to anoint a new king over Israel (1 Samuel 16:1). There, Samuel reviewed each of the sons of Jesse who were present. Jesse had not bothered to present to Samuel the youngest son, David. Instead, David was left caring for the sheep (16:4-11).

But God had chosen David to be the new king (1 Samuel 16:12-13). Though David had once been a shepherd of sheep, he would now be a shepherd of *Israel* (Ezekiel 34:23; compare John 10:1-18). And as God had been with the nation of Israel, so also would He be with David in victories over his *enemies* (examples: 1 Samuel 17:45-54; 23:14-26:25).

What Do You Think?

What events in your life do you point to as reasons for confidence in the Lord?

Digging Deeper

How can recalling this history help you or a friend continue to rely on God in difficult circumstances?

II. Future Plans

(2 Samuel 7:9b-17)

A. David and Israel (vv. 9b-11a)

9b. And have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

Whatever greatness David had achieved to this point, God had given through military victories. It is in this light that God gave the reason for not allowing the man to build a temple: “But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight” (1 Chronicles 22:8). David would not have the chance to think of himself as a great builder (compare Daniel 4:28-30).

Legacy of Faith

Christians living in the Soviet Union faced persecution. Laws prohibited their sharing the faith, even with their own children, unless the teachings aligned with the government-approved Orthodox

church. According to the law, those teaching the gospel were subject to imprisonment and could be stripped of their parental rights, resulting in children being placed in orphanages.

Even so, Christians instilled in their children a legacy of faith. Many of those children grew up to be church leaders and were ready and willing to pass on their legacy to their own children. When the Soviet government crumbled, these same church leaders jumped at the opportunity to evangelize freely within their communities.

David had a legacy of faith that began with Abraham. David remained true to that legacy. And God promised David that his children would be blessed and his name would be great. God fulfilled that in Jesus. What is your faith legacy?

—L. M. W.

10. Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more. Neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime.

The greatness God granted to David was not for David's benefit alone. The Lord was concerned for His *people Israel*. God desired not only to give David “rest” (2 Samuel 7:1) but also to give His people *a place of their own* and relief from those who had afflicted them in the past (see 7:11a, below). God did indeed desire a place—not for himself but for His people. This promise would be the fulfillment of the promise God gave Moses (Exodus 3:16-17; 33:1). The agricultural metaphor emphasizes growth and longevity within the land. God would *plant* Israel (see Amos 9:15; Jeremiah 31:27-28).

11a. And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies.

The period of the *judges* (from about 1380 to 1050 BC) followed Israel's conquest of the promised land. So, we might think of that period as the first era of Israel's life as a settled nation. That time was filled with conflict as one nation after another rose against *Israel*. God delivered Israel through the leadership of judges, but He also allowed threats to arise as Israel sank back into sin.

B. Solomon and Christ (vv. 11b-17)

11b. Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

Initially, David intended to construct a sanctuary for God. But God planned to turn the king's plan on its head and instead build a *house* for David. And though David's initial thought upon hearing this might have been of a new palace, God's further promises made clear that He would establish a kingdom and lineage for David.

12. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

God's promise would come to fruition through a descendant of David who would rise to power after David's death. The *King James Version* translates the Hebrew expression literally: David's *seed* is the focus of the promise. This word referring to one's descendant or descendants has a rich background in earlier texts of the Old Testament. God uses this word repeatedly in Genesis in promises of redemption (Genesis 3:15; 9:9; 12:7; etc.); the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received promises regarding their "seed." Now David receives a promise that builds on theirs: God will firmly establish the kingdom of one of David's offspring, one physically descended from him. This wordplay recalls how the Lord would plant Israel in the land (see 2 Samuel 7:10).

What Do You Think?

What hopes do you have for your family when your own days are fulfilled?

Digging Deeper

What actions can you take now to ensure those are *hopes* for your family and not mere *wishes*?

13. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

Prophecies with dual fulfillments underscore the cohesion of God's plan of salvation found in the Scriptures. Such prophecies have a "nearer" fulfillment, and the one in the verse before us was

realized through David's son Solomon (1 Kings 6:1, 37-38; Acts 7:47). He did build *an house* for the Lord. But quickly it became clear that Solomon's *kingdom* would not last forever. He sinned against the Lord by worshipping other gods (1 Kings 11:4, 9-13, 31-33).

For the sake of this promise made to David, God did not strip the kingdom away from Solomon. Nor did God take it entirely from Solomon's heirs—at least not for many generations. But during the Babylonian exile that began in 586 BC, the rule of David's family came to an end.

What, then, are we to make of the promise to *stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever*? We look to the fulfillment found in Christ (Acts 2:29-36; Hebrews 1:5). While the temple Solomon built was destroyed (2 Chronicles 36:18-19), Jesus builds believers into God's temple in the New Testament era (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22). And Jesus' kingdom has no end (Revelation 11:15).

14. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.

As in the previous verse, this promise applies first to Solomon and ultimately to Christ. The first statement in the verse before us is quoted in Hebrews 1:5, which clearly affirms its fulfillment in Jesus. But how can sinless Jesus be the fulfillment when He, as the ultimate son of David, did not *commit iniquity*?

We recall that Jesus was treated as though He had committed blasphemy (Matthew 26:65)—the ultimate iniquity. He took the stripes inflicted by *the rod of men* and was crucified (Isaiah 53:4-5). That suffering was not due to personal guilt; rather, He took upon himself the punishment that guilty sinners deserve.

15. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

We move to a second question: If the promise also applies to King Solomon (reigned 970–931 BC), how can God say that *my mercy shall not depart away from him* when we recall that God judged Solomon for his foolish acceptance of the



Visual for Lesson 2. Discuss the questions associated with verse 16 as learners contemplate the nature of God's kingdom.

gods of his many wives who turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:4, 9-13, 31-33)?

The key is the phrase *as I took it from Saul*, who was Israel's first king (reigned 1050–1010 BC). The people of Israel had longed to “be like all the nations” that had kings (1 Samuel 8:7, 20). Following divine guidance, the prophet Samuel was instrumental in shaping Israel's leadership into a monarchy (12:13-15). But Saul's sin and paranoia doomed his kingship (1 Samuel 13:10-14; 15:10-26; 18:8-12; 19:9-10; etc.). This pattern persisted, ultimately leading to the Lord's rejection of Saul as king (15:23, 26, 28).

The same cannot be said of either David or Solomon. David was not a perfect man or king, as events yet to come were to demonstrate (see Psalm 51). But his heart was not the same as Saul's (1 Samuel 13:14), so God chose to establish a relationship of enduring *mercy* with David. That is proven in the history of kings of Judah—where descendants of David and Solomon reigned after Israel was divided following Solomon's death—even as judgment was enacted (Isaiah 14:1-2; compare Romans 11). God's power, not David's achievements, was to be the basis for house-building, kingdom-securing, and throne-establishing.

16. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee. Thy throne shall be established for ever.

The verse before us summarizes God's promise

to David and concludes God's word for the king. Even when Solomon's magnificent temple fell to ruins at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BC, God's promise to David remained unshakable. That *house*, that *kingdom*, is established in Christ. He is David's true heir (Matthew 1:1). And what Jesus said of His church remains true: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

God's promise was given not because David proved worthy where others did not. Moving beyond 2 Samuel 7, we see David's deep failures: favoritism within his family, sexual immorality, and even murder. The promise is to David by God's grace. It is an unmerited gift, given to David despite his unworthiness. It is given to Israel despite the people's unworthiness. Ultimately, it is offered to all humanity despite all our unworthiness.

What Do You Think?

Imagine you are David learning how God fulfilled this promise. What thoughts and emotions do you have?

Digging Deeper

What encouragement regarding God's promises can you take away from this lesson?

A Grandmother's Faith

As a young girl, Lucy attended a small country church with her family. While her brothers and sisters dreaded the long sermons in a hot sanctuary, Lucy looked forward to learning more about Jesus every week. As she grew, she volunteered in her church and looked for ways to honor God in her daily life.

One Sunday, a guest missionary visited their church. Lucy listened, her full attention on the man. She imagined eating strange foods, learning a new language, and especially telling people about Jesus for the first time. She began to dream about becoming a missionary herself. But it was not to be. Still, Lucy taught her boys and then her grandchildren about Jesus. It was first Lucy's granddaughter and then a great-granddaughter

who fulfilled Lucy's dream of cross-cultural mission work.

David's heart was in the right place in his desire to build God a house (temple). But the project would fall to his son Solomon. If David made any mistake here, it was that he did not check with the Lord first before deciding. We may have good ideas, but the people or the timing may not be right in God's eyes. How often do you fail to check with the Lord before launching your own projects? See James 4:13-17. —L. M. W.

17. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.

In keeping with his role as a prophet, *Nathan* relayed what the Lord had revealed *unto David* (compare 2 Samuel 12:1-14). David's response (7:18-29, not in our printed text) reveals that the king knew this promise was not for David's family's glory but for God's. We too do well to remember that the fulfilled and yet-to-be-fulfilled promises we enjoy are opportunities to praise the Lord and bring glory to His name. Do we?

What Do You Think?

How is your sharing the gospel similar to Nathan's sharing these words with David?

Digging Deeper

What details of God's promises to David might you include when you share the gospel?

Conclusion

A. Eternal Home

Last year, my mother passed away suddenly from a brain tumor discovered only a few months prior. My father followed her in death less than a week later. One of the final requests Dad shared with the family was that he wanted our brother to inherit the family home since the rest of us already owned properties.

We spent our entire childhood in our parents' house in a small Indiana town, never relocat-

ing. As funds permitted, Mom and Dad would periodically update the flooring and replace the roof, among other things. However, before my wife and I returned to Alaska after the funeral services, I provided my brother with a list of outstanding repairs that our parents had not finished, and with a good-humored tone, I let him know that the burden of maintaining the house now fell on him.

King David had to leave the construction of God's house to his son. But God's grand plans went far beyond the building and upkeep of an inanimate temple. In Jesus, we are part of God's everlasting and holy temple. And one day, we will arrive home in the Lord, enjoying the everlasting kingdom in ways David could only dream about in his own days. This eternal residence, crafted by God, is where Christ, a descendant of David, reigns for all eternity.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your everlasting covenant promises, given to David and fulfilled in Jesus. Redirect us when our plans are out of step with Yours. In the name of Your Son, Jesus, we offer this prayer. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's promises are sure.

How to Say It

Abraham	Ay-bruh-ham.
Babylonians	Bab-ih-low-nee-unz.
Bathsheba	Bath-she-buh.
Bethlehem	Beth-lih-hem.
Hebrews	Hee-breus.
Isaac	Eye-zuk.
Israel	Iz-ray-el.
Jacob	Jay-kub.
Judah	Joo-duh.
Moses	Mo-zes or Mo-zez.
Philistines	Fuh-liss-teenz or Fill-us-teenz.
Solomon	Sol-o-mun.
tabernacle	tah-burr-nah-kul.
Uriah	Yu-rye-uh.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Allow one minute for learners to silently consider promises they have made (whether these have been honored, have yet to be fulfilled, or were broken). Ask volunteers to share one promise. Then, ask learners to break into pairs to brainstorm promises that God has made. After a few minutes, ask volunteers to share these answers as well, writing these on the board. After a brief period, ask the pairs to consider these two questions: 1–What factors prevent people from keeping promises? 2–Do any of these factors apply to God? Why or why not? After a few minutes, bring the class together to discuss.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “God’s Promise to David” exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Transition into the lesson by stating, “Today, as we delve into the heart of 2 Samuel 7:4-17, we will concentrate on the importance of God’s commitments, particularly His divine promise to King David.”

Into the Word

Before class, prepare a brief lecture covering what had happened in Israel between last week’s lesson on Ruth 4:9-17 and this week’s on 2 Samuel 7:4-17. This lecture should include information about the last days of the judges, Samuel’s ministry in Israel, Saul’s disastrous rule, and how David came to the throne. *Option 1.* Assign this overview to a volunteer to prepare before class. *Option 2.* Ask small groups to work together to summarize the events from the days of the judges to this point in David’s reign.

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Samuel 7:4-17. Distribute a handout (you create) with two headers: “Fulfillment in the Past” and “Fulfillment in the Future.” Instruct pairs to identify under the first header which promises named or alluded to in this passage were fulfilled *before* God spoke to Nathan.

Answers should include delivering Israel from Egypt (Genesis 46:3-4; Exodus 12:31-42), meeting the people in the tabernacle (25:1-22; 40:34-35), and making David king over Israel (1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Samuel 2:1-7).

Next, the pairs should identify under the second header promises that were fulfilled *after* God spoke to Nathan. Answers should include Solomon’s ascending to the throne in Jerusalem (1 Kings 1:38-40) and Jesus’ inheriting the throne to reign forever (Luke 1:29-33).

After a few minutes of work, bring the class together and discuss their answers. Again, in their pairs, have learners identify evidence that David was obedient to the instructions God gave him through Nathan. These will include that David believed that God would fulfill these promises (2 Samuel 7:18-29) and did not build the temple (1 Kings 5:3-5), although he did help prepare for its construction (1 Chronicles 22). Using sanctified imaginations, ask learners to consider how the story might have been different if David had not accepted Nathan’s words as true and obeyed the Lord’s instruction.

Into Life

Allow one minute for learners to bring to mind a course of action they have been considering. Ask them to discuss in small groups how, without the aid of a “Nathan” to definitively speak for God, they can make faithful decisions. Ask what steps learners can take to discern when the course they *want* is not *best*.

Alternative. Distribute the “Prayer Chart” activity from the activity page to be completed individually in a minute or less. *Option.* This can be sent home with students to ponder in the week to come.

Have pairs write a prayer for obedience to God, even when His plans differ from our plans. Encourage pairs to pray together before ending class.

A Father's Prophecy

Devotional Reading: Luke 1:5-17
Background Scripture: Luke 1:5-23, 57-80

Luke 1:67-80

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us,

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,

73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways,

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78 Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Key Text

Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. —Luke 1:76-77

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Zacharias’s prophecy.
2. Explain ways the prophecy could have been misunderstood in the first century AD.
3. Identify any “wilderness” of preparation the learner is in and opportunities for growth.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Present-Day Herald
- B. Lesson Context

I. Prologue (Luke 1:67)

II. Celebrating God (Luke 1:68-75)

- A. For Promises Kept (vv. 68-70)
- B. For Results Certain (vv. 71-75)

III. Appointing John (Luke 1:76-78a)

- A. His Calling (v. 76)
- B. His Task (vv. 77-78a)

IV. Predicting Result (Luke 1:78b-79)

Deadline: Year 2020?

V. Epilogue (Luke 1:80)

Your Preparation Context(s)

Conclusion

- A. Still Pointing to Jesus
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

I. Introduction

A. Present-Day Herald

Over a decade ago, the mascot at the college where I work changed from a saint to a herald. At the time, some people expressed hesitation and questioned the change. One reason for the hesitation was that the role of a *herald* is relatively unknown.

Some countries, such as the United Kingdom, still have active heralds as employees of the sovereign, but such positions are not found in the majority of countries. Perhaps we have lost something in not maintaining the role of a herald.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Luke was written about AD 60 by Luke the physician and traveling companion of the apostle Paul (Colossians 4:14). It was probably written during the period of a couple of years in which Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 23–24). Luke was not an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ life. Even so, Luke was meticulous in his research (Luke 1:1-3). The result is the New Testament’s marvelous third Gospel, written so that the reader may be convinced of the certainty of the book’s contents. One of the individuals who Luke could have interviewed was Mary, the mother of Jesus, who would have had personal knowledge of much of the events of both the birth of John and, of course, Jesus.

Luke’s Gospel begins by introducing a priest named Zacharias and his wife, Elisabeth. The couple was considered “righteous before God” and “blameless” regarding obedience to God’s commandments (Luke 1:6). At the time of the introduction in the Gospel, the couple was without children due to their age and Elisabeth’s barrenness (1:7).

The fact that Zacharias served as a priest in the division of Abia (Luke 1:5) is more significant than it might seem at first. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, the priesthood of that time was organized into 24 divisions. That matches the organization noted in 1 Chronicles 24:1-19. Every division served in the temple for roughly two nonconsecutive weeks each year.

The assigned priests would complete the necessary tasks for the temple, including accepting and offering sacrifices, burning incense, and leading prayers (1 Chronicles 6:48-49; compare 23:28-32).

During the time of Zacharias's service, an angel of the Lord named Gabriel visited him and informed him that he would have a son (Luke 1:8-19). Zacharias responded with doubt, questioning the validity of the angel's prophecy (1:18). The angel proclaimed that because of Zacharias's doubt, he would be unable to speak until the prophecies regarding the birth of the son were fulfilled (1:19-20).

The Scripture text in today's lesson includes a song of praise known as the *Benedictus*. The source of this title is the first word of Luke 1:68 in the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, which dates to the fourth century AD. Perhaps it is better known to you as *Zacharias's Song*.

I. Prologue

(Luke 1:67)

67. And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying.

The disbelief of *Zacharias* when he received the angel's message (see Lesson Context) was replaced with being *filled with the Holy Ghost*. Luke, the author, seems to have a special interest in this person of the Trinity, who is mentioned in this Gospel about the same number of times as the other three Gospels combined. In the book of Acts, Luke's subsequent work, the Holy Ghost is mentioned more than 40 times. The presence of God's Spirit has been a necessary prerequisite for God's people to serve Him through prophetic ministry (examples: Numbers 11:25-27; Acts 2:17-18).

II. Celebrating God

(Luke 1:68-75)

A. For Promises Kept (vv. 68-70)

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people.

Zacharias begins a poetic expression of blessing and praise to God. Employing parallel expressions typical of biblical poetry, his song echoes key

themes of prophetic promise from Israel's Scriptures. As God had fulfilled His surprising promise that Zacharias would become a father, so God would fulfill His greatest promises for all.

Songs and psalms of thanksgiving often include a proclamation of praise to *the Lord God* (compare Psalms 72:18; 84:11). Mary's song of praise, called the *Magnificat*, also begins with her glorifying the Lord (Luke 1:46-47).

Zacharias praised the Lord because of the Lord's actions for His people. The Old Testament describes how the Lord had come and *visited* His people for blessing (examples: Genesis 21:1; Ruth 1:6) or because of their sin (examples: Exodus 20:5; 32:34).

The reason for His coming at this particular time was so that *his people* might be *redeemed*, a conclusion also reached by the crowd in Luke 7:16. As we attempt to grasp this concept, we can simplify by realizing that when we are introduced to Jesus in the pages of the New Testament, two issues are of utmost importance: *who Jesus is* in His essence and *what Jesus did* in terms of His mission. The shorthand way of saying this is that we are learning about the person and work of Christ.

The four Gospels focus heavily on the first part of that inquiry, on establishing and describing the person of Christ. The four Gospels, however, spend almost no time explaining the work of Christ. We hasten to add that by "work," we don't mean Jesus' miracles of healing, exorcism, etc. By "work," we are referring to the eternal results of His death, burial, and resurrection. Thus, we have to wait until Paul's epistles before we can fully grasp the "how" of the phrase *redeemed his people*.

69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

The song's prophetic nature is on display as it announces the means by which the redemption arrives. In the Old Testament, animal horns were symbols of power (examples: Deuteronomy 33:17; Psalm 18:2; Zechariah 1:18-21). Through the power of the Lord God, the promised redemption—a *horn of salvation*—would come, vanquishing enemies and ruling as Messiah (see Psalm 132:17).

Zacharias recognized that the Messiah would come from one specific lineage: *the house of . . . David*. Centuries before Zacharias lived, the prophet Nathan had stated that the Lord would establish His kingdom in and through the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; compare Isaiah 9:6-7). This would bring righteousness, peace, and salvation (Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16). About six months after the birth of John, a descendant of the house of David was indeed born to fulfill the promises; His name was Jesus (Luke 1:27-32; 3:23).

70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.

This verse reminds readers that God's plan was not a new thing; rather, it had been set forth through *his holy prophets* of centuries past (example: Jeremiah 23:5; compare Acts 3:21; Romans 1:2; Hebrews 1:1; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The person and work of Jesus the Messiah validated the predictions of the prophets (Luke 24:25-27). The message of the prophets comes to a focal point in the message of Zacharias's son, henceforth known as John the Baptist, who later proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" when seeing Jesus (John 1:29).

What Do You Think?

What has been your experience of reading or studying the Old Testament prophets?

Digging Deeper

What preparation could make your study more beneficial to your spiritual development?

B. For Results Certain (vv. 71-75)

71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us.

The theme of salvation by God's Messiah is repeated often in the Gospels. Indeed, that message of salvation is their primary message! But as events would unfold, God's idea of who their main *enemies* were didn't match who the Jewish leaders and people thought were their enemies.

This misidentification distracted Jesus' own apostles right up to the time of Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:6). "The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8), not the works of the Roman Empire.

What Do You Think?

What sets biblical teaching about enemies apart from worldly wisdom on the topic?

Digging Deeper

How do your speech and actions to enemies mark you as a follower of Christ?

72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant.

God's promise *to perform . . . mercy* is witnessed in passages such as Micah 7:20: "Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old." Considering the ancient use of the literary technique of parallelism, this is the same as remembering *his holy covenant* (compare Psalms 105:8-9; 106:45; Ezekiel 16:60). The next verse offers an additional layer to this parallelism.

73. The oath which he sware to our father Abraham.

This *oath* is described in Genesis 22:16-18; it is the same as "his holy covenant" of Luke 1:72, just considered. Consider these two time frames: as we are now looking 2,000 years into the past to consider what Zacharias has written, Zacharias himself was looking 2,000 years into his own past to consider the covenant with *our father Abraham!* The centuries have proven God to be trustworthy and faithful; He keeps His promises to His people (Joshua 21:45; Psalm 145:13).

The passage of centuries had not dimmed Zacharias's expectations, and neither should they dim ours. As Zacharias could praise the Lord God, so should we (compare other praise in Luke 1:46-55; 2:28-32, 36-38).

74. That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.

The oath granted to Abraham extended to the

people of Zacharias's day (*unto us*). Nine months of being unable to speak (Luke 1:20, 64) had allowed Zacharias time to reflect on the fact that when the Lord speaks, people should listen rather than run off at the mouth!

As a priest, Zacharias was intensely interested in being able to *serve* the Lord (compare Hebrews 9:14). Interestingly, the underlying Greek word translated “serve” is also translated “worship” in Acts 7:42; 24:14. To serve God is to worship Him; to worship God is to serve Him. By the Messiah's deliverance, God's people will be able to do so *without fear*, without the specter of further defeat or persecution hanging over their heads. The way it will happen—through Jesus' death and resurrection—and one result of its happening—freedom from earthly fear (Romans 8:15; Philippians 1:14)—will astonish everyone. As Zacharias speaks, the Israelites live in fear of their *enemies*: the Roman overlords and the Jewish leadership (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The greater fear that God will eliminate, however, is the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15).

75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

As a devoted priest, Zacharias knew what it meant to serve the Lord. All his life, he had been “righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). God desires the same for others. *Holiness* means to be set apart from sin; *righteousness* means that the people always do the right thing in the eyes of God. The only other place in the New Testament where the words translated “holiness” and “righteousness” occur together is Ephesians 4:24: “[Ye were taught] that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (compare Titus 2:11-14).

Zacharias's expectation was partially fulfilled

when Christ established the church, whose members are a “holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). The ultimate fulfillment will come when we serve Christ in full holiness in Heaven (Revelation 22:3).

What Do You Think?

How accurate would it be to say that you serve God without fear and in holiness and righteousness?

Digging Deeper

To the extent that this statement is not completely true, what step(s) can you take to improve this week?

III. Appointing John

(Luke 1:76-78a)

A. His Calling (v. 76)

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest. For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.

Zacharias switches focus to his (only) *child*, John, and John's pending role in God's plan of salvation. That role will be to prepare hearts and minds for the coming of a greater one. John was to be like a herald, coming in advance of the king and announcing the king's arrival so that people might prepare. John was to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Luke 3:4, quoting Isaiah 40:3; compare Malachi 3:1). Some 30 years later, John's ministry fulfilled the words of his father (Matthew 3:11-12; Mark 1:1-8; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:19-34).

Implied in this ministry is the kind of prophetic work Israel knew from earlier times when prophets like Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah took up their own prophetic ministries. This child would become *the prophet of the Highest* (compare Mark 11:32) as the forerunner of the coming Lord. He would be like the prophet Elijah (Elias), preparing the people for the promised salvation (Matthew 11:14). Such a description is consistent with the announcement of the angel regarding John's birth, saying that John will “go before [the Lord]

How to Say It

Abia	Uh-bye-yuh.
Gabriel	Gay-bree-ul.
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Messiah	Meh-sigh-uh.
Zacharias	Zack-uh-rye-us.

in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luke 1:17) as he turns “the children of Israel . . . back to the Lord their God” (1:16).

What Do You Think?

To what degree is our calling (example: Matthew 28:16-20) like John’s calling?

Digging Deeper

What challenges do we face in fulfilling our calling? What encouragement can we take from John’s example of ministry?

B. His Task (vv. 77-78a)

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

The underlying Greek word for *remission* is translated elsewhere as “forgiveness” (examples: Mark 3:29; Acts 5:31; 13:38), and that is the sense here. John’s ministry included calling for repentance (Matthew 3:2) and “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of *sins*” (Luke 3:3).

The *salvation* mentioned here would prove to be more than just political salvation from oppression; *people* would be offered a spiritual, eternal *salvation*. The hope and mercy that God’s people desired would come from God’s redemption and salvation in Christ (Acts 4:8-12; Romans 8; Hebrews 9:28; etc.).

78a. Through the tender mercy of our God.



Visual for Lesson 3. As the class discusses verse 79, ask learners to take one minute to consider whether there is any darkness they have not renounced.

The designation of the Lord as *our God* occurs more than 200 times in the Bible. God is not an abstract concept; He is intensely personal. The fictitious gods of paganism cannot be characterized by their *tender mercy*—those gods are seen as fickle. The word translated “tender” is interesting. In a literal, physical sense, it refers to one’s bowels or intestines (Acts 1:18). In a figurative or emotional sense, this area of a person was considered to be the center or origin of compassion (see the word’s translation as “affection” in 2 Corinthians 7:15; an intense form of the word occurs in James 5:11).

IV. Predicting Result

(Luke 1:78b-79)

78b-79. Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

By contrast, today we speak of one’s heart as that center or origin. So, we can say that Zacharias’s Song reminds us that God’s motivation for sending the Messiah is the mercy of God’s own heart. That mercy brings something like the dawning of a new day, to which *the dayspring from on high* refers.

Darkness is a common image for the state of those who oppose God (examples: Psalm 107:10-11; Jeremiah 23:12; John 3:19; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Ephesians 6:12). In this state, *death* is inevitable (Romans 5:12; 6:23). But God promises *to give light to* those in this state (Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16; Acts 26:18). It is Jesus who brings light into darkness (John 8:12). A sad and continuing part of the problem, however, is that although “light is come into the world, . . . men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Deadline: Year 2020?

Back in the year 2010, a former Minister of Defence in Canada revealed his skeptical view of humanity’s future in his book *Light at the End of the Tunnel*. He asserted that the year 2020 was the deadline for ending dependence on fossil fuels for

energy. Exotic forms of energy already existed, he claimed, but a “shadow government” controlled their secret. One of the writer’s imperatives was that all people must find ways to work together for the common good.

As of this writing (October 2023), the dire predictions have not come to pass, claimed “right nows” have not been verified, and working together for the common good is as much of a pipe dream as it ever was.

Two millennia ago, Zacharias announced by the Holy Spirit a very dissimilar “was / now / will be.” Unlike that of the writer above, the elements of the prophecy of Zacharias lined up perfectly, as 2,000 years of history have proven. Those who prophesy by their own insight aren’t always guaranteed to be correct; those who prophesy by God’s empowerment are always right, to the farthest distance of the future. How will you prepare yourself to demonstrate this to a skeptic?
—R. L. N.

V. Epilogue

(Luke 1:80)

80. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

This verse takes us out of Zacharias’s Song and summarizes John’s formative years. Luke’s Gospel provides parallel statements about Jesus (Luke 2:40, 52). Becoming *strong in spirit* may refer either to John’s determined willingness to conform to God’s will, or it may describe the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Your Preparation Context(s)

The contrast between what we might call the “preparation contexts” of Joseph and Moses is fascinating: Joseph was prepared in a desert to serve in a palace (Genesis 37:1-22; 41:39-40); Moses was prepared in a palace to serve in a desert (Exodus 2:10; 3:1). Other preparation contexts are equally fascinating. The apostle Paul, for example, was a rising star in first-century Judaism (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14). But when he as persecutor became the persecuted, his preparation context changed

abruptly from that of the city to the desert (Galatians 1:17-18) to . . . everywhere.

We could explore other examples. Springing immediately to mind are the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and John the Baptist. Such an exploration also invites a consideration of our own personal preparation contexts. The biblical examples teach us that as much as we might like to have a comfortable, familiar preparation environment that is followed by an equally comfortable service setting, it just won’t happen that way. That’s not God’s pattern. In what ways do you need to change your expectations in this regard?
—R. L. N.

What Do You Think?

How can the “deserts” be places of preparation for us?

Digging Deeper

What practices can prepare us to be formed by these desolate experiences?

Conclusion

A. Still Pointing to Jesus

Speechless for nine months, Zacharias offered an impressive, memorable song in celebration of John’s birth. Layering phrase after phrase from the ancient prophets, he made clear to all that the time of fulfillment had arrived.

We are the beneficiaries of those promises and their fulfillment. We have the holy Scriptures so that we can know the factual certainty of it all (Luke 1:4). As we do, we experience the salvation, mercy, knowledge, and light that God gives in Jesus Christ. Our expression of joy and thanks ought to be at least as vivid as Zacharias’s, if not more so.

B. Prayer

Great God, we thank You that by Your mercy, we have received the fulfillment of Your eternal promises in Jesus. May we live in full confidence of Your abiding faithfulness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Reject the darkness; embrace the light.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

As learners enter the classroom, distribute index cards and pens and ask learners to write down one prediction about the future. It can be silly or serious and does not have to be spiritual or Bible-related. Once all learners have had time to respond, ask volunteers to share predictions with the class. Have learners rank each prediction from 1 to 5, 1 being least likely to happen and 5 being most likely. When all the volunteers have shared their predictions, ask learners to explain the criteria they considered regarding whether a prediction seems more or less likely to come true.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “False Prophecies” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs or small groups to complete the exercise as indicated.

After either activity, tell the class, “Today we are going to study a prophecy made by the father of John the Baptist that is related not only to his life but also to the coming of Jesus.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Luke 1:67-80. Work together as a class to outline God’s previous words and actions, as recounted by Zacharias, as well as the anticipated works that would be fulfilled in John and Jesus. Work in small groups to find the Bible references for the people, events, or promises that Zacharias mentioned as having happened in the past (roughly Luke 1:67-75). Pay special attention to concepts like the “horn of salvation” (1:69) that are somewhat obscure *and* others like God’s “holy covenant” (1:72) that might seem so familiar that believers might take their meanings for granted. Consult the commentary for cross-references and other helps as desired. Bring the class back together to discuss the references or concepts they found to be particularly important or surprising.

In the same small groups as before, have learners find the Bible references for the people, events, or promises that at the time were yet to be fulfilled by John or Jesus. Encourage learners once again to pay special attention to any concepts with which they are unfamiliar or that may seem overly familiar. When groups have finished, bring them back together to discuss their key findings.

Into Life

Ask learners to discuss how these examples from Luke 1:67-80 of God’s past provision give them confidence about His continued care in the future. Allow one minute for silent reflection on any situation where learners need to apply this confidence.

Distribute pens and paper to the class. In small groups, have learners work to update Zacharias’s prophecy as a blessing for a new minister. This blessing needs to include two parts: (1) praise for God’s past work and faithfulness, and (2) hopes for the minister’s future. Take into account not only Israel’s history as Zacharias knew it but also the history of the church.

Option. If your congregation is welcoming or training a new minister or sending out a missionary, consider personalizing your hopes and prayers to that person’s specific context.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the exercise “Baby Dedication” from the activity page. Give learners time to complete the assignment as instructed before sharing it with a partner. If you choose to use this activity, be sensitive to learners’ different experiences with parenting, childlessness, and other potentially painful situations. Encourage partners to pray together when they have finished discussing.

Conclude the class in prayer, a hymn, or a chorus familiar to the whole class. Appropriate choices might include “This Is My Father’s World” or “Good Good Father.”

Savior's Birth

Devotional Reading: Micah 5:1-6
Background Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Luke 2:1-16

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David).

5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. And they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not. For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Key Text

It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. —Luke 2:15

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify those invited to visit the newborn Jesus.
2. Trace on a map the route and distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem.
3. State a way that he or she will “go to Bethlehem” in a spiritual sense this Christmas season.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Life-Changing Announcement
- B. Lesson Context

I. In Those Days (Luke 2:1-7)

- A. The Decree of Rome (vv. 1-3)
- B. The Journey of a Family (vv. 4-5)
- C. The Birth of a Child (vv. 6-7)

Hopes and Expectations

II. In the Fields (Luke 2:8-16)

- A. Angelic News (vv. 8-12)
- B. Heavenly Host (vv. 13-14)
- C. Shepherds’ Response (vv. 15-16)

Drop Everything Now

Conclusion

- A. Journey to Bethlehem
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Life-Changing Announcement

At one point or another, monotony afflicts us all. One day might feel the same as the previous day. Repetitive days become redundant weeks, and we seek any relief from the cycle of monotony.

Occasionally, a life-changing event breaks up the monotony. The first day of school, a wedding, a parent’s funeral, or a national tragedy are examples of joyous or sorrowful events that change our lives.

I imagine that shepherds in the first century AD faced boredom and monotony in their work. Their tasks were likely the same day-to-day: ensure sheep were well-fed and safe. However, for some certain shepherds outside Bethlehem, their whole lives changed in a moment one evening. Today’s text details the events that brought a life-changing announcement to these shepherds.

B. Lesson Context

Today’s lesson text is part of a much larger story in Luke 1–2 that details Jesus’ conception and birth. Luke weaves this story with his account of John the Baptist’s conception and birth (see lesson 3). Both births were announced by an angel, accomplished by God’s miraculous power, and accompanied by wonders that God performed.

Luke juxtaposed the birth accounts for two reasons. First, John the Baptist was a prominent figure in first-century Judea. His disciples traveled as far as Ephesus in Asia Minor (Acts 19:1-3). Second, Luke’s Gospel demonstrates the link between the ministries of John and Jesus. John was a messenger preparing people for the coming Messiah (see Isaiah 40:3-5, quoted in Luke 3:4-6). Jesus was this promised Messiah, a fact confirmed by Simeon (Luke 2:25-32). By telling the birth stories of John and Jesus, Luke emphasizes how these events were all part of the same glorious plan of God.

In the centuries before Jesus’ birth, the Roman Empire had conquered territories around the Mediterranean Sea. By 63 BC, Rome had conquered the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding territory, although it took some years for the Romans to solidify their control. Caesar Augustus became emperor in 27 BC. Due to his numerous

building projects, he had to tax his people heavily. Those who did not submit to Roman authority could be fined, flogged, exiled, or executed.

Roman domination was more than a political and economic burden for the Jewish people. It was also a religious problem: as long as Rome ruled, God did not (or so it seemed). The reality of Roman occupation was a constant reminder that God had consigned Israel to a state of exile—even “exile” within its own borders—for generations.

The faithful looked to the promises of Scripture for hope. God had promised a great Son of David to rule over His people (2 Samuel 7:12-16) and restoration beyond exile (Isaiah 51:11). One day, the pagan powers would be destroyed, and God would rule supreme over all nations (Daniel 7:1-14). By the first century AD, centuries had passed since God first gave His promises. The faithful looked beyond the failures of their forefathers and kept their trust in God’s promise to take back His world.

These ideas intersect with Luke’s story of Jesus’ birth. The power of Rome is portrayed through its ability to tax. We glimpse the oppression of Israel in the poverty of Jesus’ family. The promise of God is evident as we hear again of David, whose promised Son is to rule over all.

I. In Those Days

(Luke 2:1-7)

A. The Decree of Rome (vv. 1-3)

1. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Luke transitions the narrative of his Gospel account from the birth and childhood of John the Baptist and the subsequent worship from his father, Zacharias (Luke 1:57-80). The phrase *in those days* places the events of the text during the reign of the emperor *Caesar Augustus* (27 BC–AD 14).

The growth of the Roman Empire depended on taxes. These monies funded the military, allowing the spread of the *Pax Romana*, or “Roman peace.” To standardize the tax-collection process, the emperor issued *a decree* to take a census of *all the Roman world*. An accurate count of the empire’s residents was necessary to gather the most taxes.

This verse also reveals Luke’s intention to give an orderly account of the context of the story of Jesus (compare Luke 1:1-4). By presenting the historical circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth, Luke demonstrated that Jesus was born in a real and specific context.

2. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

Estimating the exact year of Jesus’ birth proves challenging. The mention of “Herod” in Matthew 2:1 and Luke 1:5 gives us a time frame for Jesus’ birth. That individual is Herod the Great, king of Judaea. He died in 4 BC, so Jesus’ birth must have occurred before that time. However, historical sources outside the Bible state that *Cyrenius* became *governor of Syria* in 6 AD, about 10 years after the death of Herod the Great.

There are multiple ways to understand Luke’s statement without assuming he made a mistake. First, the underlying Greek word translated *governor* may refer to a lesser position in the government. According to the historian Tacitus, Cyrenius was elected “Counsel” of Syria in 12 BC, and Luke may have been referring to this position. It is also possible that the sentence structure in the original language means that this was the tax that occurred *before* Cyrenius was governor of Syria.

Considering the timing of the reigns of Caesar Augustus and Herod the Great, a reasonable calculation places the birth of Jesus at around 5 or 4 BC.

3. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

Roman taxes required that each person return to the *city* of his or her ancestors to be counted in a census. Ancestral records or land-ownership titles determined the citizenship of that town. However, as their housing situation in Bethlehem would soon reveal, it is unlikely that Joseph owned property or a home in Bethlehem (compare Luke 2:7, below).

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh- <i>l</i> osh-unz.
Cyrenius	Sigh- <i>r</i> ee-nee-us.
Ephesus	Ef-uh-sus.
Herod	Hair-ud.

What Do You Think?

How should Christians discern whether or not they should cooperate with the directives given by the government?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind that guide your decision-making in this regard?

B. The Journey of a Family (vv. 4-5)

4-5. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

Before receiving news of the census, *Mary* had been in *Nazareth* in *Galilee* (Luke 1:26-27). *Joseph* also lived in Nazareth, as the two were *espoused* to be married. Following the census requirements, Joseph traveled to his ancestral home *because he was of the house and lineage of David* (compare Matthew 1:6, 16). The town of *Bethlehem* had been the hometown of David before he became king (1 Samuel 17:12, 58). The name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread,” a fitting meaning for the birthplace of the one who is “the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48).

The couple *went up* on the journey because Bethlehem is located in the mountains of Judea at an elevation of approximately 2,550 feet above sea level. The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem required a total elevation gain of about 1,250 feet.

The trip between the towns was about 85 to 90 miles, depending on the route. A day’s journey on foot could cover up to 20 miles. However, Mary was in the late stages of pregnancy and *great with child*. Further, the trip was fraught with danger and hardship. The couple risked injury due to the rugged terrain, possible ambushes by bandits, and challenging weather conditions. The journey may have taken the couple a week or longer.

C. The Birth of a Child (vv. 6-7)

6. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

After arriving in Bethlehem, Mary went into labor. Luke does not indicate the time between when they arrived and her labor.

7. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary’s pregnancy came to its fulfillment, and she gave birth to *her firstborn son*—an obvious point because she was a virgin (Luke 1:34). This detail also implies that she had other children in the following years (compare Mark 6:3).

The first order of business was to wrap the newborn *in swaddling clothes*, long cloth strips that bound the infant’s limbs. This method ensured the baby stayed warm and felt secure. An ancient non-biblical work notes that the baby who would later become King Solomon “was nursed in swaddling clothes, and that with cares. For there is no king that had any other beginning of birth” (Wisdom of Solomon 7:4-5). The opposite is seen in Ezekiel 16:4.

A *manger* was a feeding trough for domesticated animals. A tradition dating back to the second century depicts Jesus’ birthplace as being a cave. This place might have resembled a rudimentary cellar for storing perishables and housing domestic animals. The promised Messiah, God’s own Son, entered the world in a place reserved for cattle—a humble backdrop seemingly unfit for the “firstborn of every creature” through whom “were all things created” (Colossians 1:15-16; compare 2 Corinthians 8:9).

The expression *there was no room . . . in the inn* has led some readers to imagine that Mary and Joseph were denied space at an ancient hotel. However, the underlying ancient Greek word translated as *inn* can also refer to a guest room in a house (example: Luke 22:11). One possibility is that the couple was staying with an extended family member who had *no room for them* because of other family members in town for the census. As a result, the couple found themselves in the only available living space in the house.

Hopes and Expectations

The birth of our first child did not go as we

had hoped. My wife and I had decided on a home birth with a midwife. Complications during labor led the midwife to suggest we go to the hospital. There, doctors concluded that a C-section would be necessary. As my wife recovered from the procedure, I joyously held my newborn son, Wilder. That joy, however, soon changed.

Doctors informed us that Wilder had a bacterial infection that required immediate transport to the neonatal intensive care unit. If not treated immediately, the infection could spiral into meningitis.

I boarded an ambulance with my newborn son, encased in a transport incubator. He spent a week in the NICU, but it felt much longer for my wife and me. Eleven years have passed, and Wilder sits on my lap as I write this illustration.

My wife and I could never have expected how the first weeks of our son's life would play out, but we trusted that God would lead us through that season. Using my "sanctified imagination," I envision Mary and Joseph also had certain hopes and expectations for the birth of Jesus, which likely did not include a manger for a cradle. How are you preparing to trust God, no matter the circumstances?

—C. S.

What Do You Think?

How have you seen God work through surprising circumstances?

Digging Deeper

How can you get better at noticing God's work around you?

II. In the Fields

(Luke 2:8-16)

A. Angelic News (vv. 8-12)

8. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luke's Gospel brings readers' attention to the fields outside Bethlehem. *Shepherds* worked an important but lowly profession in the ancient world: caring for and tending to sheep. The hill country surrounding Bethlehem contained suitable pastureland for tending to sheep and goats (compare 1 Samuel 16:4, 11). Shepherds and their

flocks were typically *in the field* from early spring to early fall, but nothing in the Gospel accounts confirms the exact time of year of Jesus' birth.

9. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

Scripture sometimes depicts angels as heralds, messengers for God (examples: Zechariah 1:14-17; 3:6-7; Matthew 28:5-7). Unlike the previous angelic appearances in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:11-20, 26-38), this particular *angel* is unnamed.

Consider how the shepherds might have felt. They had been guarding their flocks, on alert for sounds from predators or thieves. Out of that silence came a sudden angelic appearance with *the glory of the Lord*. No wonder they were *afraid!*

10. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Scripture sometimes depicts angels as agents of God's judgment (examples: 2 Samuel 24:16-17; Revelation 15:1). Therefore, upon seeing *the angel*, the shepherds may have feared pending divine judgment. The imperative, *fear not*, acknowledged their fears (compare Genesis 15:1; Luke 1:30). The *good tidings of great joy* brought by the angel were the beginning of the gospel message.

11. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

The statement *unto you* reveals the intended recipients of this message. Shepherds were among the first to receive the good news of the child *born* in Bethlehem. The proclamation signaled that God was overturning the world's expectations, casting down those considered mighty by the world's standards and raising up those considered lowly, like these shepherds (see Luke 1:52; compare 7:22).

This child would someday be a *Saviour* for people (compare Luke 1:47; John 4:42). Jesus' work, culminating in His death and resurrection, enacted God's plan of salvation for the world (1 John 4:14).

The title *Christ* comes from the ancient Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew title *Messiah* (compare John 1:41; 4:25). Both titles mean "anointed one," referring to the anointed Redeemer and King of the people of God as proclaimed by the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 9:6-7; 16:5; Micah



Visual for Lesson 4. Display this visual as you discuss Luke 2:4 and the possible routes taken by Mary and Joseph.

5:2; etc.). The promised Messiah would save His people and establish a reign of peace (see Zechariah 9:9-10). First-century Jewish belief held that the Messiah would come from the family of *David* (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Jeremiah 23:5-6) and the town of Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2-4; Matthew 2:3-6).

Lord is a term of absolute authority. The Roman emperor was often called the “savior” and “lord” of the empire. By referring to Jesus as *the Lord*, the angel proclaimed the arrival of the absolute and eternal ruler of the cosmos (compare Matthew 28:18).

12. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The *swaddling clothes* were expected for a newborn (see Luke 2:7, above). On the other hand, the *manger* was unexpected, not ordinarily used as a crib for a baby. This *sign* would confirm to the shepherds that everything the angel said about Christ had been accurate.

B. Heavenly Host (vv. 13-14)

13. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying.

The sudden manifestation of a heavenly multitude emphasizes the angel’s message. The Old Testament identifies *the heavenly host* as an army of angelic messengers who served the Lord of Hosts (examples: 1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 103:21).

Luke, more than any other New Testament writer, includes the theme of praising God in his writings. A form of the phrase *praising God* appears nine times in the New Testament, seven of which are found in the writings of Luke (here and in Luke 2:20; 19:37; 24:53; Acts 2:47; 3:8-9).

The text does not say whether or not the heavenly host sang or spoke their praise, only that their voices joined to praise God. What the prophets had prophesied, even without understanding the full import of their own words, was being fulfilled. And what the angels longed to see (1 Peter 1:10-12) was finally revealed.

14. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The host’s message of praise is two-way, intended to be received by *God* and directed *toward* the good of humanity. The *glory* given to God acknowledges His power and His work of salvation. The phrase *in the highest* refers to the place where God resides (compare Luke 19:38). Though God is all-powerful, He revealed himself in and through humble circumstances: a baby born in a manger.

The second part of the statement refers to the genuine *peace now on earth*. The Roman Empire brought the *Pax Romana* through force, but only God can bring eternal peace. His peace is not just the cessation of hostility or the absence of conflict; it is the good news of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6; Acts 10:36). One of the most significant peace pronouncements of the New Testament is Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to be an agent of God’s peace in the world?

Digging Deeper

How might you respond to the claim that *peace* only refers to the absence of conflict?

C. Shepherds’ Response (vv. 15-16)

15-16. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds

said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

The angels delivered their message and praises and then departed *into heaven*. This raises some intriguing questions. Did they simply disappear? Was there a visible departure until they could no longer be seen? What is not in doubt, however, is the shepherds' response. Stunned, they collected their thoughts and took the only reasonable actions their experiences led them to do.

It was just as the angel had said: shepherds found the infant Jesus *lying in a manger*, with *Mary and Joseph* in attendance. Without a doubt, this was a privileged group of people who gathered that night. God makes himself known to the lowly (Luke 10:21).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to be attentive to God's directives, even if they are highly disruptive to your plans?

Digging Deeper

What distractions might you need to remove in order to hear better from the Spirit of God?

Drop Everything Now

One Sunday, when my wife neared full-term pregnancy with our daughter, I had been scheduled to preach at a church about two hours away. She had experienced some contractions that morning, but we didn't think she was going into labor. Still, I was apprehensive about traveling hours away from her. We agreed that I would preach and promptly return home.

Before I began the sermon, I placed my phone face-up on the pulpit. I informed the congregation of my wife's situation. If she called during my sermon, I would answer and, if needed, leave immediately. I would drop everything to be with her.

The congregation understood, and, fortunately, I did not receive a phone call. Almost two weeks later, my wife gave birth to our daughter.

What things would cause you to drop everything immediately? The word of the angels and the revelation from the Lord were enough for these shepherds to drop everything to visit the newborn baby in the manger.

During this time of year, it seems like *everything* requires our attention and focus. What steps must you take to be like the shepherds and "drop everything" to make time for Christ during this Christmas season? —C. S.

Conclusion

A. Journey to Bethlehem

The circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth subvert our worldly expectations of value and importance. Among the first people to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth were not the powerful and elite, although such people did receive the announcement (see Matthew 2:1-12).

Instead, the first announcement of good news came to lowly shepherds. In that instant, their lives forever changed. Their journey to Bethlehem resulted in the spread of the gospel message. They left Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus that night, ready to proclaim the good news they had received (Luke 2:17-18). How will you have a spiritual "journey to Bethlehem" to receive and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?

What Do You Think?

How has this lesson led you to think differently about the Christmas story?

Digging Deeper

How will you respond in light of this fact?

B. Prayer

God our Savior, show us how we might "travel to Bethlehem" this Christmastime. Reveal how we might be messengers of the gospel to all people. Thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God loves and invites the lowly.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Begin by asking for volunteers to describe how they plan for an extended trip. Ask each volunteer the following questions: 1—What steps were involved in planning the trip? 2—How did you decide what to pack for the trip? 3—What decisions were made regarding the number of stops on the trip? 4—What did you learn about yourself as you planned this trip?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Packing List for Expecting Parents” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “Even our best plans can sometimes go awry. We can trust that God will provide for us, regardless of the circumstances and our expectations. Today’s lesson will show us how God provided and revealed His work in a way no one could have expected.”

Into the Word

Option. Choose volunteers to play the roles of Caesar Augustus, Joseph, Mary, an angel of the Lord, the heavenly host, and the shepherds. Select another volunteer to be the narrator. Ask the narrator to read aloud Luke 2:1-6 while other volunteers act out the events of the passage. Volunteers may use their “sanctified imagination” to improvise certain events from the story. After reenactment, ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “What part of this story impacted you the most and why?”

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:1-7. Divide learners into groups of three and ask the following questions for in-group discussion: 1—What was the significance of the decree from Caesar Augustus? 2—What is the significance of Joseph’s (and Mary’s) journey to Bethlehem? 3—What Scripture texts speak of Bethlehem’s significance? 4—Why was it significant that Jesus was

placed in a manger? 5—What are three ways that God provided for the needs of Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus? 6—In what unexpected ways has God provided for you or your family?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:8-16. Have learners discuss the following questions in the same groups: 1—Describe when you felt fear after experiencing a work of God. How did you respond? 2—How would you articulate the “good tidings of great joy” to a modern-day audience? 3—How has God, through Christ Jesus, brought peace to the world? 4—What is the significance that God chose to announce this news to shepherds, a group not highly regarded in the first century? 5—What is the significance that the shepherds were given a sign to find the baby?

Option. Distribute copies of the “Mixed Message” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After three minutes, ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 2:14 so that pairs may check their answers.

Into Life

Say, “The Christmas season gives us the opportunity to reflect on God’s call on our lives and how we can follow Him. In the story of the first Christmas, the shepherds followed God’s call by going to Bethlehem. In our context, we can ‘go to Bethlehem’ in a spiritual sense and notice God’s work.”

Distribute a pen and index cards to each learner. Ask them to write down in one minute or less a way that he or she will “go to Bethlehem” in a spiritual sense this Christmas season.

Place learners into pairs and have them discuss their response before answering the following questions with their partner: 1—What distractions do you need to remove to hear God’s direction better as you “go to Bethlehem”? 2—Who is an accountability partner or spiritual mentor who can help you on this spiritual journey? 3—What is one thing that God could teach you as you “go to Bethlehem”?

David's Son

Devotional Reading: Luke 4:14-21
Background Scripture: Luke 18:31-43

Luke 18:35-43

35 And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.

36 And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

37 And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

38 And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

39 And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

40 And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him,

41 Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

42 And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.

43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God



Key Text

They which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. —Luke 18:39

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize how the blind man’s persistence illustrates Jesus’ statement in Luke 18:1.
2. Analyze the connection the blind man makes between Jesus and the “Son of David.”
3. Write a prayer to become a person of persistence.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Persistent Prayer
- B. Lesson Context

I. Realization (Luke 18:35-38)

- A. Time and Place (v. 35)
- B. Individuals and Crowds (vv. 36-38)

Look-alikes

II. Reactions (Luke 18:39-41)

- A. Rebuke and Insistence (v. 39)
- B. Approach and Queries (vv. 40-41)

Why the Asking?

III. Remedy (Luke 18:42-43)

- A. The Effect of Faith (v. 42)
- B. The Results of the Miracle (v. 43)

Conclusion

- A. Don’t Stop Asking
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Persistent Prayer

When my 17-year-old half-brother left home, he told our parents that he was done with them and with Christianity. He joined the navy, got a young woman pregnant, married her, and then divorced her after 15 months, signing over complete custody of their son in the process. After leaving the navy, he spent the remainder of his 20s involved with drug use and two more broken marriages. By age 32, he was unemployed, mired in debt, and living with a woman to whom he was not married.

My brother and I didn’t speak for 15 years after he left home. We were very close, and his departure crushed me. I had idolized him growing up. He was handsome, athletic, and charismatic—all things I wanted to be. But over time, my appreciation turned to anger and resentment. I felt that if he didn’t want to be in my life, I didn’t want anything to do with him. My parents didn’t speak about him, and neither did I. Only once did we hear about how poorly he was doing, and I thought he deserved that suffering he had brought on himself.

My mother, however, never stopped praying for him. Every night before bed and every morning upon waking, she would pray to God and ask Him to reconcile my brother to Him and restore our family.

After 15 long years, my brother called my mom. His friend had invited him to church, and he had begun to go regularly. He had committed his life to Christ. As a result of his changed life, he asked for forgiveness for the ways he had treated our family. The next day, my mom flew to Florida to meet him and bring him back with her. As they embraced each other for the first time in 15 years, she wept and thanked God for answering her persistent prayer.

B. Lesson Context

Today’s Scripture text takes place on Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem, a journey that began in Luke 9:51. At the point in Luke’s Gospel of today’s lesson, the end of the journey is drawing

near. Today's text, Luke 18:35-43, describes the fourth and final miracle in what we might call "Luke's journey section" (compare the other three in Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; 17:11-19).

Just before today's text begins, Jesus had warned His disciples (again) that He, the Son of Man, was going to die and rise again on the third day (Luke 18:31-34; compare direct references and allusions to Jesus' death in Luke 5:35; 9:22, 44-45; 12:49-50; 13:32-33; 17:25). As we read the numerous events and teachings between Luke 9:51 and 18:35, we get the impression that Jesus was in no hurry.

Also in no hurry—but by necessity rather than choice—were the physically infirm of the era, especially those who were blind. Blindness was a familiar condition in the ancient world, with the Bible itself using some form of the word *blind* dozens of times. From our current scientific vantage point, there was no reliable cure for blindness in Jesus' day and little understanding of its varied causes.

But the ancient mind was not cautious about thinking of one cause of blindness in particular: many believed it to be a curse from God for some type of sinful behavior. The sins of the parents were thought to affect their children, causing them to be born blind (compare John 9:1-2). But regardless of the cause, blindness was economically and socially debilitating. Blind men could not serve as priests (Leviticus 21:16-18) and had little opportunity for employment. They were reduced to begging or depending on family support to survive.

Parallels to today's text of Luke 18:35-43 are Matthew 20:29-34 and Mark 10:46-52. An interesting fact regarding these parallels is that although Mark's Gospel as a whole is the shortest of the three, Mark's version of the event is the *longest* of the three!

I. Realization

(Luke 18:35-38)

A. Time and Place (v. 35)

35a. And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho.

Located near the Jordan River, about 17 miles east of Jerusalem, the city of *Jericho* is infamous for having been destroyed by God some 14 centuries prior to the encounter described in Luke 18 (Joshua 6). Archeology reveals that there were actually two locations for Jericho in the first century: (1) the ancient location as described in the Old Testament and (2) the complex rebuilt by Herod, approximately one mile from the more ancient location. The modern city of Jericho includes both sites.

35b. A certain blind man sat by the way side begging.

The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark reveals more of the identity of this *certain blind man*: he is "Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus" (Mark 10:46). The fact that Luke doesn't give the name is a bit surprising, given his tendency to give more actual names relative to how frequently the other three Gospels do so. The non-inclusion of the man's name here may be due to the fact that Luke was not an eyewitness (Luke 1:1-4). But ultimately, this is speculation.

For a person living in the first century AD, any degree of visual impairment was untreatable. Corrective lenses, as we have them today, would not be available for centuries to come. The most serious visual impairment is, of course, blindness. People who were so afflicted had few, if any, viable treatment options and were unable to work in many occupations (see the Lesson Context for more background). *Begging* alongside heavily traveled roads or next to city gates was frequent. The Law of Moses pronounced a curse on those who took advantage of the blind (Leviticus 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18).

B. Individuals and Crowds (vv. 36-38)

36. And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.

The exact makeup and number of *the multitude* is not given. In Luke 12:1, we see the description of an "innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another." This crowd—undoubtedly with drop-outs and add-ins along the way—was tagging along with Jesus' on His final journey to Jerusalem (see Lesson Context).

It was not unusual for people to travel long

distances in large groups. Bandits would frequently wait along roads to ambush solitary travelers. While the Roman road system and garrisons had made travel safer, banditry was still exceedingly common. Indeed, the parable of the Good Samaritan actually begins with this common scenario; its setting is the same road between Jericho and Jerusalem on which Jesus and His companions traveled (Luke 10:30).

A crowd of people naturally generates a great deal of noise, especially when enthusiastic about something. This occurrence is what catches the attention of the man who was blind.

37. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.

The designation of *Jesus* being of *Nazareth* or as a “Nazarene” occurs about two dozen times in the New Testament—all in the four Gospels and Acts. Although Jesus was not born in Nazareth, He grew up there (Luke 2:39; 4:16, 23-24; compare Matthew 2:23). As a variant of the name *Joshua*, the name *Jesus* might have been common at that time. But there was no other person who had worked miraculously among the people—no other person who could be recognized by such a designation, as evidenced by the next verse.

38. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

The designation of *Jesus* as the *Son of David* reveals something that the blind man can “see” in contrast to the spiritually blind religious leaders (Matthew 22:41-46). Since the Messiah was to come from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:3-4; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:17-22), He was also referred to as the “Son of David” (Luke 20:41-44). Jesus was a descendant of David because He was Joseph’s adopted son, as Luke established earlier in his Gospel (Luke 3:23-38). By calling Jesus the “Son of David,” the blind man showed that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.

But even such recognition did not guarantee a complete understanding of the Messiah’s role (Luke 24:19-27; Acts 1:6). It is no coincidence that Luke relates Jesus’ prediction of His own death and resurrection to His 12 disciples just before this encounter with a blind man (Luke 18:31-

34). The disciples, too, had acknowledged Jesus as they traveled with and learned from Jesus for three years. Still, when Jesus warned them that He would soon die and rise again according to the Scriptures, they did not understand Him. On the other hand, the blind man did not know Jesus; in fact, he could not even see Jesus. Yet he possessed the spiritual sight to recognize that Jesus truly was the promised Messiah of Israel. (We should note that the Hebrew word translated *Messiah* and the Greek word translated *Christ* mean the same thing: “the anointed one”; see John 1:41; 4:25.)

What Do You Think?

When have you cried out to Jesus for mercy?

Digging Deeper

How did you experience His mercy?

Look-alikes

One day, when I was young, I discovered my mother and paternal grandmother looking at old photographs. With a confused look, my mom held up one picture and asked, “When did we have this picture of Laura taken?”

“That’s not Laura,” my grandmother answered. “That’s me when I was little!” We all gathered around to see the photo. It looked so much like me that we could understand my mom’s confusion. As I have grown, I have begun to look more and more like my father, who looks a lot like his mother. When people meet my dad, they comment about how much alike we look. Similarly, my youngest daughter looks a lot like my husband. I recently looked at a photo of them together and felt shocked to realize they have the same eyes, smile, and nose.

We probably assume that a person needs visual acuity for such recognitions to be made. But in today’s lesson, it was a man lacking eyesight who recognized Jesus as David’s son! The text doesn’t say how he was able to do so. But the Bible has much to say about those who have eyes but fail to see (Matthew 13:14; Mark 4:12; 8:18; Acts 28:26). How can you ensure you have no “spiritual blind spots” in this regard? And how can you

ensure that people recognize Jesus in your life?
—L. M. W.

II. Reactions

(Luke 18:39-41)

A. Rebuke and Insistence (v. 39)

39. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

The crowd attempted to quiet the blind man. Luke does not explain their reasons, but it may have to do with the way that important people were treated in the ancient world. Most people believed that those individuals who were important and famous stood above common people's concerns. The group may have thought they were paying Jesus due honor and respect by keeping someone they considered unimportant from bothering Him.

The blind man, however, showed no concern for such a social norm. Instead, he pressed *so much the more* as he called again for Jesus' *mercy*. Like the widow who pestered the judge in search of justice (Luke 18:1-8), the blind man ignored barriers in his way and persisted in asking Jesus for help.

What Do You Think?

In what circumstances do you find it most difficult to cry out to God?

Digging Deeper

What benefit is there in crying out anyway, even if your petition is not answered as you hoped?

B. Approach and Queries (vv. 40-41)

40. And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him.

Based on ancient ideas of honor and the value of persons, the blind man had very little worth (see fuller explanation in Lesson Context). Thus, it is likely that the crowd didn't expect this reaction by Jesus. But Jesus was an expert at subverting expectations.

41. Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.

At the outset, we should realize that Jesus doesn't ask this question to correct an information deficit—to learn something that He doesn't know. He already knows what the man needs. One legitimate reason for the question is that Jesus wanted everyone present to hear the specifics of the man's request. The recovery of sight would have been a very impressive miracle, and Jesus could have wanted His audience to recognize the full impact of what was taking place.

A second possible reason for Jesus' question is that Jesus may have wanted the blind man to demonstrate faith. By stating the great problem that he had, the blind man risked embarrassment for even asking for something so bold.

What Do You Think?

Do you boldly bring your requests to the Lord? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

How do you practice boldness in prayer while also asking that the Lord's will be done (Matthew 6:10)?

Why the Asking?

"Mommy!" the toddler cried. "What?" his mom asked. "Mommy!" he repeated. "What?" she said, a bit louder this time. This pattern continued until the child's mother came close to her son, lowered herself to look him straight in his eyes, and asked, "What do you want?"

The little boy smiled broadly, spread his arms, and wrapped them around his mother. She returned his embrace, cuddling him close until he pulled away and turned his attention to his toy truck.

I watched this with a smile, remembering my own children and the sheer number of times they called out "Mommy!" over the years. A mother's instinct is to ask what their child wants. Mom wants to meet the needs of her child and wants him to feel loved and connected. Sometimes, she knows all he wants is a hug. Sometimes, she



Visual for Lesson 5. Ask volunteers to share their answers to the question associated with verse 38. Read the visual together as a prayer.

already knows his needs, but she lets him ask nonetheless.

Jesus knew the man was blind and knew what he wanted, but Jesus asked him anyway. In so doing, Jesus empowered the man to make a bold request. How can passages such as Ephesians 6:1; Philippians 4:6; and Hebrews 4:16 empower you to be as bold? How does the caution of James 4:3 direct your boldness properly? —L. M. W.

III. Remedy

(Luke 18:42-43)

A. The Effect of Faith (v. 42)

42a. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight.

Christians have been reading this story for nearly 2,000 years, and the radical nature of this healing is less clear to us than it would have been to the original readers. There were many people in the first century who claimed to have the power to heal. Frequently, they depended on calling for the help of higher spiritual forces. Many in the ancient world believed that healing various ailments required connecting with spiritual beings. These beings held special positions in the cosmic hierarchy. To get help from these beings, one would have to know their names and perform elaborate rituals to lure them. In other words, many saw healing as a kind of magic that only beings higher up the celestial hierarchy could accomplish.

In contrast, Jesus did not summon such beings for help. He didn't ask for a heavenly creature to heal the blind man. He didn't perform any special rituals or even touch the person. Instead, Jesus simply commanded that the man *receive . . . sight*. Unlike ancient exorcists, Jesus had the power to heal others. He merely spoke, and the blind man was healed. In so doing, Jesus demonstrated power over human bodies that only the Creator of those bodies could possess.

42b. Thy faith hath saved thee.

It may be tempting to understand the man's *faith* as saving faith—the admission of one's guilt for sins and request for Jesus to be forgiven. But there is no mention of sin in this passage; Jesus does not claim that the man's sins have been forgiven (contrast Mark 2:1-12).

Instead, *faith* in this context likely refers to two related aspects of the blind man's actions. First, he rightly identified Jesus as the expected Son of David. Second and most important, he persisted in his request when everyone around him pressured him to be silent. The man rejected the pressure of the crowd and focused only on who Jesus is and what Jesus can do. He continued to ask for healing even when everyone around him wanted him to stop. The man's persistence thus showed his faith in Jesus and his trust in the Messiah's love, compassion, and power.

What Do You Think?

What difficulties arise if we assume faithful people are always healed of their maladies?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples offer counterbalances to this assumption?

B. The Results of the Miracle (v. 43)

43a. And immediately he received his sight.

The power of Jesus is further shown by the speed with which the healing occurs. Jesus simply spoke the word, and *immediately*, the blind man received his sight. Unlike supposed healers among the Greeks and Romans, Jesus' commands

have instantaneous results. The particular Greek word being translated “immediately” is a favorite of Luke’s; 17 of the word’s 19 occurrences in the New Testament occur in his Gospel and book of Acts.

43b. And followed him, glorifying God.

This result is interesting to contrast with a healing outcome in Luke 8:38-39. In that earlier passage, a healed man wanted to accompany Jesus but was refused. We see no such refusal in the passage at hand, however. The difference is attributable to the shifting context of Jesus’ ministry. The episode in Luke 8 occurred outside the traditional boundaries of Israelite territory, and the timing wasn’t right for Gentile outreach (Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24; Acts 1:8). The context in our lesson passage is different: Jesus is on His final trip to Jerusalem. There were likely no drawbacks for one more person to join the crowd.

43c. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

The shock wave of the healing sent ripples across *all the people*. And we can’t help but wonder if those who *gave praise unto God* were the same ones who had tried to silence the blind man just a few minutes earlier.

This ending also sets up a surprise for the reader. One would expect that someone as powerful as Jesus would have continual victories wherever He goes. That impression is supported in the next chapter, as Jesus brings Zacchaeus the tax collector to repentance (Luke 19:1-10) and as Jesus enters Jerusalem with a crowd of people who call Him “King” (19:38). Yet Jesus had warned His disciples more than once that He would have to die and rise again (18:31-33; see also Lesson Context). The reader is thus primed to experience the shock of Jesus’ death and the joy of His resurrection that follows.

What Do You Think?

What reason do you have for praising God today?

Digging Deeper

What benefit is there to inviting your community to praise with you?

Conclusion

A. Don’t Stop Asking

Today’s text illustrates the point on persistence that Jesus made at the beginning of Luke 18. The blind man knew that Jesus was his only hope to receive healing. The man did not heed the crowd’s admonishment to be silent—quite the opposite! He did not give up. Like the persistent widow of Luke 18:1-8, he kept asking the Lord for help. The formula “faith + persistence” was (and is) powerful indeed.

Jesus’ encouragement for faithful persistence remains as sure as it was when He spoke 2,000 years ago. My mother never stopped praying for my brother, despite having no support in that regard from either me or my father. She put her faith in a gracious God, trusting Him to bring her wayward son back to Him and to our family. God responded to my mother’s persistence in prayer and healed our relationships. Even so, prayer is only one way by which we can demonstrate persistent faith. There are others. Can you name some?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us faithful persistence in all things related to Your Son—the promised Son of David. Strengthen our faith to serve You and the kingdom over which Jesus reigns. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Persistent faith is vital.

How to Say It

Bartimaeus	<i>Bar-tih-me-us.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
Jericho	<i>Jair-ih-co.</i>
Jerusalem	<i>Juh-roo-suh-lem.</i>
Leviticus	<i>Leh-vit-ih-kus.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Nazarene	<i>Naz-uh-reen.</i>
Nazareth	<i>Naz-uh-reth.</i>
Timaeus	<i>Ty-me-us.</i>
Zacchaeus	<i>Zack-key-us.</i>

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

At the beginning of class, ask learners to define the word *faith*. Encourage the use of dictionaries, biblical examples, or other pertinent resources. *Option.* Distribute copies of the “Defining Faith” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before bringing the class back together.

Once the class has a working definition of *faith*, ask if *faith* might have more than one meaning or nuance depending on what or whom a person is putting faith in. One example to consider could be whether faith in a spouse is different from faith in God or one’s teenager.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today we will see what Scripture has to teach us from a blind man who nonetheless could see that Jesus was the Son of David. The blind man’s faith in the right person gave him his sight.”

Into the Word

Option. Before class, ask for any eye care professionals or seeing-impaired learners to speak to the class about their insights into blindness. If you have any lawyers in the class, you can ask them to talk about the kinds of protections that the government offers for seeing-impaired people in the workplace, seeking housing, etc. Close this portion of class time by comparing and contrasting the experience of blindness in Jesus’ time versus today. Use the Lesson Context as desired.

Ask three volunteers to read Luke 18:35-43 out loud as the narrator, Jesus, and the blind man. The remaining learners can read the part of the crowd together (Luke 18:37b). Then split the class into three groups: the **Jesus Group**, the **Blind Man Group**, and the **Crowd Group**. Each group should reread the passage together and then discuss this event from the perspective of Jesus, the blind man, or the crowd. Ask learners to consider what moti-

vations, knowledge, and insight seemed to be driving their individual or group to speak and act as they do.

After the groups have had time to discuss, bring the class back together and ask volunteers from the groups to summarize the perspective they analyzed. Then ask the class to compare and contrast their findings with those of the other groups. *Option.* Draw a Venn diagram with three circles on the board to keep notes.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Miracles in Luke” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Give learners time to work in small groups to complete the activity as directed. Then, bring the class back together to discuss what they discovered.

After either activity, discuss as a class the significance of Jesus being called the “Son of David” (Luke 18:38-39); consult the commentary as needed to lead this conversation. Be sure to cover where this phrase originated, what expectations were attached to it, and how Jesus fulfilled or upended those expectations.

Into Life

Distribute handouts (you create) with two headers: “Like the Faithful Man” and “Like the Crowd.” Give learners one minute individually to brainstorm ways they are like the man who was healed and like the crowd who saw it unfold. Then, in pairs, have learners discuss the challenges they face in faithfully calling out to Jesus, whether because of a crowd or other concerns. As a class, discuss how Jesus’ identity as the Son of David can bolster our confidence in Christ.

Give learners some time for silent reflection and prayer, then break the silence with a prayer for the class. *Option.* Conclude class with an a cappella rendition of “Open My Eyes, That I May See” or another hymn or praise chorus appropriate to the lesson.

The Lord Is King

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17
Background Scripture: Psalms 9, 10

Psalm 10:12-18

12 Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up thine hand. Forget not the humble.

13 Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it.

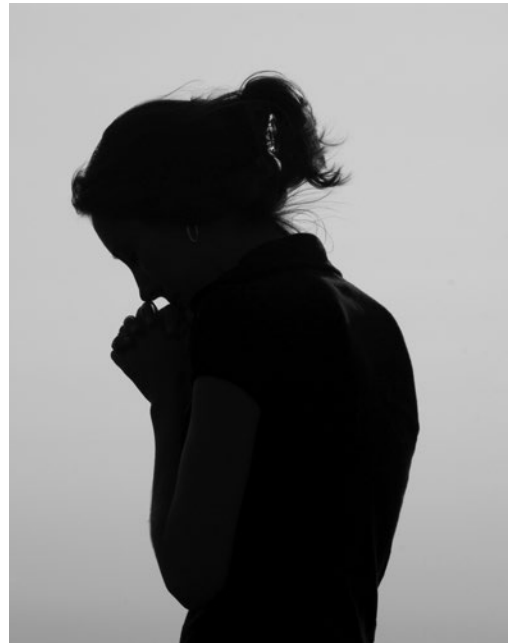
14 Thou hast seen it, for thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with thy hand. The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

15 Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man. Seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

16 The LORD is King for ever and ever. The heathen are perished out of his land.

17 LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.

18 To judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress.



Key Text

LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear —Psalm 10:17

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the psalmist's confidence in God.
2. Identify one or more imprecatory elements of the psalm.
3. Make a plan to identify and correct an area of life to rely more on God and less on self.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Does God Listen?
- B. Lesson Context

I. Humanity's Evil (Psalm 10:12-13)

- A. Solution to a Problem (v. 12)
Being God's Hands
- B. Problem That Needs a Solution (v. 13)

II. God's Awareness (Psalm 10:14)

- A. Regarding Oppressors (v. 14a)
- B. Regarding Outcome (v. 14b-c)

III. God's Intervention (Psalm 10:15)

- A. Desired Retribution (v. 15a)
- B. Desired Scope (v. 15b)

IV. God's Character (Psalm 10:16-18)

- A. The One Who Reigns (v. 16)
Wasted Money?
- B. The One Who Hears (v. 17)
- C. The One Who Rescues (v. 18)

Conclusion

- A. The God Who Helps
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Does God Listen?

Mark Twain once said, "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest." Most of us desire to live with honor, courage, joy, and goodness most of the time. Sometimes we succeed. Twain was, as usual, probably too pessimistic, but his point stands. The human pursuit of the good suffers from inconsistency. We want to be good but are surprised by people who consistently are.

The Christian confession, however, is that God's pursuit of the good does not suffer in the same way. God consistently seeks the good for all creation. The search can be complicated, however, because humans are complicated. Sometimes, injustice and evil seem to prevail, and we wonder if God is. We wonder whether He hears the cries for help that vulnerable people utter.

This question carries some urgency for believers in the God of the Bible. If God is active in the world, what is that activity? Does God sit around listening to praise songs and cheering on our church growth plans or pious sermons? Or do these things sometimes offend God when they don't result in (or from) our assistance to the poor or oppressed? Today's text points us to the correct answers.

B. Lesson Context

Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single poem. It was split apart to serve separate purposes. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts count them as two psalms, while the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, counts them together as one.

The entire poem falls into four roughly equally sized sections: Psalms 9:1-10; 9:11-20; 10:1-9; and 10:10-18. Each part contributes something to the overall picture as the poem moves toward a request for God's help in a world of suffering and struggle.

Psalms 9 and 10 form a partial acrostic as they use 17 letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet, successively, as the lines progress. (A complete example of using all 22 letters to form the acros-

tic is Psalm 37.) It is unclear whether the incomplete nature of the acrostic of Psalms 9 and 10 was deliberate.

Many digital Bibles label the titles or headings of the Psalms as “verse zero.” So, if you’re using an electronic Bible, these headings can offer additional context or insight into the following psalm. Many psalms, however, lack a superscription, and Psalm 10 is one of those. However, the superscription of Psalm 9 applies to Psalm 10 as well, given the unitary nature of the two passages. That superscription reads, “To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben, A Psalm of David.” The word *Muthlabben* refers to the death of someone, perhaps David’s son Absalom. David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1), is credited as the writer of about half the 150 psalms.

I. Humanity’s Evil

(Psalm 10:12-13)

A. Solution to a Problem (v. 12)

12a. Arise, O LORD.

We see here the first of three requested actions—requests that go from general to specific. See also Psalms 3:7; 9:19; 17:13; and 132:8.

12b. O God, lift up thine hand.

The sense of this requested action is a desire for divine retribution. Such a desire implies a desire for God to assume the role of the divine warrior (as in Psalm 106:26 and Isaiah 26:11). It also can paint a picture of God’s ability to save (compare Psalm 17:7). But the two ideas are not mutually exclusive—the former can result in the latter.

An image of God’s engaging in war is problematic to modern eyes. This is because the image can be misused to justify atrocities by some people against others. Scripture often uses this imagery to depict God’s commitment to ending wrongdoing and ensuring justice (example: Isaiah 59:9-21).

12c. Forget not the humble.

We come to the third requested action—the most specific of the three. People *forget*, but God does not (Psalm 9:17-18). Therefore, this request

may seem strange, given that God always has complete mastery of all facts. Even so, the psalmist speaks similarly in several other passages (13:1; 9:12; 25:6; 42:9; 44:24; 74:19; 77:9). Suffering or a sense of isolation often results in a feeling of being forsaken (compare 22:1; 71:9-13; contrast Ezra 9:9), thus the cry of desperation.

Such cries come from *the humble*. The word being translated does not describe a person’s attitude but their economic or social condition (see Psalms 9:18; 74:19, where the same word is translated as “poor”). The fact that this word occurs 31 times in the Psalms indicates its importance.

What Do You Think?

What specific request can you bring before God in prayer for those in your neighborhood or town experiencing suffering?

Digging Deeper

In what ways might God use you as an answer to these prayers?

Being God’s Hands

Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) was a clergyman who was one of the first Spanish settlers in the New World. Initially in favor of slavery, he eventually saw this to be wrong. Consequently, he dedicated his life to advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Witnessing people’s suffering at the hands of the Spanish conquerors, he felt compelled to act. Just as the author of Psalm 10 asks God to help the oppressed, de las Casas likely viewed himself as an instrument of God in addressing such injustices.

Consequently, de las Casas mobilized resources, recruited sympathizers, and organized relief missions to assist and support the oppressed and needy—and he spent 50 years of his life in this endeavor. God sometimes intervenes personally to make things right, but He prefers to work through people to do so (Ezekiel 22:30). How does the story of de las Casas motivate you to act as God’s hands and stand up for oppressed people? —O. P.

B. Problem That Needs a Solution (v. 13)

13. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, thou wilt not require it.

This verse adds to the description of *the wicked* in Psalm 10:3b. The word *contemn* and the phrase *thou wilt not require it* may be hard to understand. The verb *contemn* is closely related to the familiar noun *contempt*; therefore, the idea is that of despising or disdainng God. What such a person claims *in his heart* is to be above accountability (*thou wilt not require it*). But that is never true (Genesis 9:5; Deuteronomy 18:19; Ezekiel 3:18-20; 33:6-10; Romans 3:19).

Sinful conduct toward those in need can take two general forms: active oppression (compare Isaiah 10:1-2; James 5:1-4) and benign neglect (compare Deuteronomy 15:7-8; 1 John 3:17). The care of vulnerable people does not interest the wicked—only their exploitation. Either behavior shows contempt for God (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5).

The righteous person, by contrast, fears God. He or she shows this by doing good for others, even at personal risk (example: Exodus 1:17). The wicked have gotten away with their behavior for so long that they think themselves to be immune from God’s justice (contrast 2 Peter 3:9).

II. God’s Awareness

(Psalm 10:14)

A. Regarding Oppressors (v. 14a)

14a. Thou hast seen it; for thou beholdest mischief and spite.

The appeal to God becomes more direct as the psalm calls God’s attention to the atti-

tudes and actions of the wicked. God is aware of such behaviors and responds to them. And, just as important, the psalmist is aware of God’s awareness.

The word translated *mischiefs* is also translated as “trouble” (Job 5:6-7), “misery” (Proverbs 31:7), and “labour” (Ecclesiastes 2:21-24). The word translated *spite* similarly has a somewhat wide range of possible meanings, including “anger” (Ecclesiastes 7:9), “grief” (Proverbs 17:25), and provocation (1 Samuel 1:6). The focus is therefore not so much on the attitudes and actions of evildoers, but rather on the results of their evil actions. Some human suffering comes about because of the actions of others, and God takes up the cause of the vulnerable.

What Do You Think?

In what ways are you aware of God’s awareness of your attitudes and actions?

Digging Deeper

What will you do in light of that fact?

B. Regarding Outcome (v. 14b-c)

14b. To requite it with thy hand.

This clause translates as “to give with your hand.” The idea is that God raises His arm to defeat the evildoers in the earlier verses, so He also uses His strength to provide for the oppressed by His hand (compare Psalm 104:28; contrast Isaiah 36:15; 37:10).

14c. The poor committeth himself unto thee; thou art the helper of the fatherless.

In the Old Testament, the people most at risk or in need are often categorized as widows, *the poor*, and *the fatherless* (examples: Isaiah 10:2; Zechariah 7:10). A fourth category used sometimes is “stranger,” referring to a non-Israelite (example: Leviticus 25:35). Usually, however, only two are mentioned in the same verse, and that is the case here.

Helpless people realize that God is all they have. The psalmist takes God’s care for such people as a given, a theme often occurring in Scripture (examples: Exodus 22:21-24; Isaiah 58:6-7). The

How to Say It

Absalom	Ab-suh-lum.
Assyria	Uh-sear-ee-uh.
Babylonia	Bab-ih-low-nee-uh.
exegesis	ek-suh-gee-sus.
Muthlabben	Moot-law-bent.
Psalter	Sawl-tur.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.
Zephaniah	Zef-uh-nye-uh.

descriptor of God as the “helper” of those in need frequently appears in the Old Testament (examples: Psalms 37:40; 54:4; 79:9; Isaiah 41:13-14). We must embrace God’s concern for how people treat one another (Leviticus 25:35; Luke 6:27-42; etc.). Condemnation of those who neglect or exploit the vulnerable is not a lesser concern in the New Testament (Luke 16:19-31; etc.). Those who sincerely cry out to God for help will find a listening ear. Trust in God’s willingness to aid defines the very heart of faith (1 Timothy 4:10).

III. God’s Intervention (Psalm 10:15)

A. Desired Retribution (v. 15a)

15a. Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man.

The text requests punishment for the evildoer. In seeing the phrase *break thou the arm* we might humorously think of “being disarmed” in a pun-like way. But that would be reading a modern concept into the text. Instead, we should be engaged in discerning the psalmist’s original intent (a practice called *exegesis*).

We begin traveling down the road to correct exegesis when we realize that the word *arm* is not referring to a literal breaking of someone’s physical arm. Instead, the word is a figure of speech for the concept of *power* (examples: Deuteronomy 4:34; 9:29; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17). We see God’s breaking of arms in just that sense in Ezekiel 30:21-24.

The image of breaking arms of the wicked also appears in Psalm 37:17. The breaking of enemies’ “teeth” in Psalm 3:7 is similar. God, as a mighty warrior, is undoubtedly able to do this (Jeremiah 20:11; Zephaniah 3:17). But the image in the text at hand seems to be that of the evildoers as being like soon-to-be powerless warriors. Their arms are broken; they can no longer oppress the vulnerable.

The psalms also speak, conversely, of the need of the righteous to be brokenhearted for God to sustain and redeem (Psalms 34:18; 51:17; 69:20; 147:3). Those who have been crushed by life have a sure advocate in God. Connecting the two ideas,

we see the breaking of the arms of the wicked as God’s response to the decision of the wicked not to break their hearts before God.

B. Desired Scope (v. 15b)

15b. Seek out his wickedness till thou find none.

This half-verse may seem puzzling at first. The ancient Greek version, the Septuagint (see Lesson Context), is translated as “his sin shall be sought for, and shall not be found.” The idea is that God’s cleansing of sin is to be so complete that there is none (zero!) left to be found. The unerring ability to discern good and evil and to assess the proper response qualifies God to be, as Abraham put it, “the Judge of all the earth” (Genesis 18:25).

IV. God’s Character (Psalm 10:16-18)

A. The One Who Reigns (v. 16)

16a. The LORD is King for ever and ever.

God’s actions fall into three categories: He creates, rules, and redeems. The confession of the Lord’s kingship acknowledges the second of those three. It is a significant idea in the Psalter (Psalms 93–99, especially). *The Lord is king* over the nations and peoples, whether they like it or not. God’s rule should be a subject of confession and worship. The psalmist calls upon all reading or singing this text to recall that God—not the idols nor the rulers of empires—is the ultimate ruler. No other sovereign reigns *for ever and ever* (Psalms 21:4; 41:13; 45:6; 48:14; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How does the knowledge that “the Lord is King for ever and ever” influence your current behavior?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does this truth give you hope? In what ways is this truth difficult for you to accept?

Wasted Money?

Does your church waste money? Some



Visual for Lesson 6. *Before concluding class, allow learners one minute to consider how they might humbly cry out to God for the needs of others.*

church buildings are ornate, indicating significant expenditures. The pricey artistic expressions may include depictions of Bible personalities and events via stained glass, lithographs, statuettes, iconography, architecture, etc. The faith tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church is an excellent example of this.

It's easy to criticize all this as a waste of money (compare Mark 14:4-5). The gentle response is that such works of art—many from centuries past—were (and are) ways to communicate biblical truth to disadvantaged people who were (or are) unable to read. God's kingship, such as in Psalm 10:16, is an oft-repeated theme in the various art forms. This theme is also repeated in the Scriptures because, quite simply, we need constant reminders (compare Psalms 29:10; 41:13; 45:6; 48:14; 93:2; 145:1; etc.).

The truths of God's eternal kingship, as embodied by the person and work of Christ, must be communicated (Matthew 28:19-20). What method will you use? —O. P.

16b. The heathen are perished out of his land.

The second half of the verse says something about the future of the Israelites. Centuries after David's reign (1010–970 BC), the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah came to be dominated by a succession of massive pagan empires. First, it was Assyria, then Babylo-

nia, then Persia. This order of invasion was predicted in Deuteronomy 8:20. For *the heathen to be perished out of his land* reflects confidence that domination by foreign empires will end.

The psalm does not blame the Israelites' coming travails solely on those great empires. Instead, 20/20 hindsight allows us to detect a hint of repentance-to-come since that is a prerequisite for the removal of God's judgment that comes via those empires (Isaiah 7:18-25; 13:1-5, 19; etc.).

B. The One Who Hears (v. 17)

17. LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble, thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.

The meaning of being *humble* is explained in the commentary on Psalm 10:12, above. The verse before us gives us the opposite of Psalm 10:3, which speaks of the desires of wicked people. Other psalms witness the double-edged nature of human *desire*. Some desires are evil (Psalms 78:29-31; 106:14-15; 112:10), and some are holy (21:2; 38:9). The latter is the case in this verse.

The difference between the *heart* of the humble and that of the wicked is key. The heart of the wicked is one of disloyalty (Psalm 78:8, 37). God listens to our prayers when we offer them from a pure, undivided heart.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure your heart does not become disloyal and wicked toward God?

Digging Deeper

Who is an accountability partner who can help you in this regard?

C. The One Who Rescues (v. 18)

18a. To judge the fatherless and the oppressed.

To judge means to “defend in court” or “argue on behalf of.” For God to do so on behalf of *the fatherless and the oppressed* is a model for humans to do likewise (compare Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; contrast Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 5:28). Orphans

as a vulnerable group are discussed in the commentary on Psalm 10:14c above (see also Deuteronomy 24:17). The word translated *oppressed* is somewhat rare in the Old Testament, occurring only here and in Psalms 9:9; 74:21; and Proverbs 26:28.

18b. That the man of the earth may no more oppress.

As God protects those lacking families, support systems, etc., we should see this as a model to emulate. We are to be God's hands and feet in relieving oppression.

What Do You Think?

Who are the "fatherless" and the "oppressed" in your neighborhood? in your city?

Digging Deeper

To what extent should believers advocate for using political and social systems to bring assistance to people who are victims of injustice and oppression?

Conclusion

A. The God Who Helps

People cry out to God during times of distress and count on Him to rescue them from that trouble (Psalm 30:10). We may find ourselves without any human helper in various situations as we cry out to God in our isolation and fear. We cry for help even when the distress originates in our stubbornness and sinfulness. When that happens, God sometimes turns a deaf ear to our prayers (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; Lamentations 3:8, 44). At such times, we need to examine the motives of our hearts, and Psalm 10 helps us do so.

Psalm 10 speaks of the God who helps. This image of God appears frequently in the book of Psalms and elsewhere in the Bible. It is fundamental to the understanding of God that the church inherited from ancient Israel. God is neither distant nor indifferent. His level of concern for suffering humanity far exceeds our own. His interest does not ebb and flow like the fictitious pagan gods.

We may feel that God is distant when our prayers are not answered on our timetable. Such was the case with a particular Bible college professor who realized the need to make a transition in his teaching ministry. A teaching position at a different college seemed to be a good fit, but after an interview, the possibility fell through when one faculty member voted *no* for the applicant. The following year, however, the professor was called to a different position for which he was ideally suited. God's timing was perfect, but it took 20/20 hindsight to see that fact. "God's timing is perfect" is still the answer to the church's cry, "O Lord, how long?" (compare Psalms 6:3; 13:1-2; etc.).

The confession that God is a helper is an acknowledgment that leads to great confidence in our hearts. It comforts us during times of terror; it equips us to live holy lives. As the helper, God allows us to remember that no human abuse can ultimately destroy us or diminish the value of our lives (Psalm 118:6-7).

Such confidence does not come from a sense of pride or the idle belief in our superiority. It comes instead from an awareness that we serve a trustworthy God who aids those in need as long as we recognize our own needs and the shared needs of others. We cannot claim grace for ourselves but deny it to others. The divine helper stands ready to equip those seeking His mercy with a pure heart.

We cry out not only for our own needs but also on behalf of others who are oppressed in some way. However, we should anticipate that God may expect His help to that person to come through your hands!

B. Prayer

O God of the orphan, the widow, and the oppressed, attune us to the needs of Your world! Be the king of our lives and celebrate with us when the lives of our brothers and sisters flourish because of Your mercy. We humbly ask that You use us in Your work of overcoming evil. Lord, hear our humble cry! In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God is still available to help.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have this question written on the board as class members arrive:

What was a situation that most disappointed you regarding how things turned out?

Learners can begin pondering this question as they arrive. Invite responses after cautioning against using real names or situations involving your own church. As learners respond, ask them whether the disappointment included disappointment with God. (*Option.* Wait until all have responded who are inclined to do so before asking that question rhetorically.) Acknowledge the reality of emotions that accompanied the situations.

Alternative. If the above is problematic for the nature of your class, substitute the activity “Listen to Grandpa . . . or Don’t?” from the activity page, which you can download. Distribute copies to study pairs or triads to complete as indicated.

After either activity, transition to Bible study by acknowledging the reality of competing ideas about “how things should be” and what action should be taken (or not taken) to achieve ideal results. Explain that Psalm 10 offers insight into such questions.

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer from the class to read Psalm 10:12-18, today’s text. Then role-play a debate that is concerning this resolution, which you write on the board:

Resolved: God-as-King has always placed a priority on reversing the situation of the oppressed and providing for their needs.

Divide the class into two groups: one to support the truth of the resolution and one to take a skeptical approach. Allow each group time to talk

among themselves to discuss debate strategy and content. To help your groups start their thinking, you can distribute a “hints” handout (you create) that suggests various possibilities. Some of those possibilities include (1) the use of examples to support or oppose the resolution, (2) Paul’s technique in Acts 17:16-33, where he did not quote Scripture to support his arguments, (3) the techniques of Paul’s opponents in that same passage, (4) a possible misinterpretation of the psalm itself, and (5) consideration of the imprecatory (curse) elements of the psalm.

Conduct the debate in this format:

1. Main argument(s) in favor of the resolution
2. Main argument(s) opposed to the resolution
3. Refutation(s) of the “in favor” position
4. Refutation(s) of the “opposed” position

Option. If the “in favor” side has the burden of proof, reverse steps 3 and 4.

Into Life

Distribute handouts (you create) of the following *case study* involving a true story: A woman was having lunch with several colleagues at work. During the meal, she expressed an unending stream of distressing thoughts regarding her adult son, who was getting himself into financial trouble in various ways. She kept bemoaning the fact that her son wouldn’t listen to her. At one point, a colleague reminded her about Jesus’ instructions on not worrying but letting God handle things (referring to Matthew 6:25-34). She responded, “I’m not worried. I’m concerned.” Have study pairs or triads discuss an appropriate “more God, less me” response.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Justice Begins Now . . . with Me?” exercise from the activity page as a take-home for learners to complete as indicated. To have a higher level of compliance, state that participants should be prepared to read their prayers to the class next week.

The Lord Is Majestic

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 52:1-12
Background Scripture: Psalms 47; 93



Psalm 93

1 The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself. The world also is established, that it cannot be moved.

2 Thy throne is established of old. Thou art from everlasting.

3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

4 The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

5 Thy testimonies are very sure. Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Key Text

The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself. The world also is established, that it cannot be moved. —Psalm 93:1

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify what God is “mightier than.”
2. Compare God’s actions as Creator to His actions as Ruler.
3. State which of Psalm 93’s five verses speak most closely to his or her current situation and why.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Power and Authority
- B. Lesson Context

I. God’s Reign (Psalm 93:1-2)

- A. Strong and Secure (v. 1)
- B. Without Beginning (v. 2)
Long Live the Queen

II. God’s Words (Psalm 93:3-5)

- A. Mighty in Power (vv. 3-4)
Can You Hear Him?
- B. Great in Holiness (v. 5)

Conclusion

- A. Praise to the King!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Power and Authority

What images do you associate with the highest government authorities? For people in the United States, the White House, Capitol Hill, or even the Constitution might be the most powerful images. In a monarchy, perhaps the face of a king or queen comes to mind, or a palace or crown. While these images might not always have positive connotations, they are typically linked to authority and power. All these symbols of authority are meant to evoke respect and inspire confidence in a nation’s citizens.

The world of the Bible had its own symbols of power and authority. Kings wore colorful robes and golden crowns. They built public monuments and enormous palaces to honor themselves and celebrate their accomplishments.

But human authorities, even good leaders, fall short of perfection. They fail, often spectacularly. Those called to protect can cause harm. In times of crisis, the symbols of authority can evoke fear and anger instead of respect and confidence. Then and now, the world longs for a new kind of authority, a different king. Psalm 93 celebrates the King we have been seeking.

B. Lesson Context

How do we describe things we have never experienced? One way is to use our imaginations to compare what we have not experienced to what we have. We gain an approximate understanding of things we have not seen by likening them to things we have seen. So it is with this psalm. We have not directly seen the glory and power of God, but we can compare God’s glory and might to the glorious and powerful things we have experienced, knowing He surpasses them all. In a sense, our text is an exercise in imagination directed by God’s inspiration.

This psalm uses two literary devices extensively. One is *personification*. This convention uses images and descriptions of human life to describe God. This is personification not because God is an impersonal power, but because He is not confined to human characteristics, especially not

physical human characteristics. Indeed, we have not seen God. But John's Gospel reminds us that Jesus Christ, the divine, incarnate Son of God, revealed God through His real, tangible presence in the world (John 1:18). In Jesus, the Creator God has become not just near to us but one of us. In Jesus, God's majesty and power became visible among real people in a real time and place. Only in Christ's incarnation could we literally talk about, say, what God wears.

The other device used here is *parallelism*. This technique builds an image through repeating or nearly repeating one phrase or idea. Doing so strengthens the power of the description (consider Psalm 93:3, below). Understanding these features of Psalm 93 (and many others) allows us to join the worship and appreciate the beauty of Hebrew poetry, which is so different from our own and yet still powerful.

Many psalms begin with a superscription that ties the poem to a specific psalmist or occasion (examples: Psalms 3, 50, 121). These headers provide some context for the psalm at hand. The risk of misunderstanding based on vague or missing context is low; we might contrast reading a psalm with reading one of Paul's epistles. The psalms were written from personal experience, whether of praise, lament, both, or other occasions, but they were used as the hymnbook of ancient Israel. We could compare our own singing of hymns; the context for the lyrics can be powerful, but the experiences we bring to our singing are what ultimately give the song real power to speak to us as we sing to the Lord.

Psalm 93 does not contain a superscription, but it is set in a collection of kingship psalms (Psalms 93–99 or 100, with the possible exception of Psalm 94; see 93:2, below). As the phrase suggests, *kingship psalms* celebrate the king, though sometimes this might be a Davidic king and other times the Lord. Or sometimes it might be that one of the kings wrote the psalm, and so it has a kingly aspect.

There was a time in biblical scholarship when this collection was considered to be part of an enthronement festival in Jerusalem. However, many points against this hypothesis have largely

discredited the idea. For one thing, there is no biblical record of such a festival. We might expect to see such a time mentioned in Leviticus 23. Without any evidence, we have no reason to assume such a time was observed. For another, enthronement festivals in other ancient Near Eastern cultures suggested a *beginning* or *renewal* of a god's reign (compare Psalm 93:2, below). The Babylonian god Marduk was enthroned every year, for instance. God had no need of such a ceremony to renew His reign.

I. God's Reign

(Psalm 93:1-2)

A. Strong and Secure (v. 1)

1a. The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girded himself.

The LORD (with small caps) translates God's proper name, often transliterated as "Yahweh" for English speakers. This name is first recorded in Exodus 3:14, when Moses asked how to refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Tetragrammaton (which refers to the name *Yahweh*, only four letters in Hebrew) means "I am who I am" or "I will be what I will be." The name conveys God's reliability to be himself, not fickle or changing as people or pagan gods can be.

To speak of God's clothing is to personify Him—that is, to describe Him with human characteristics even though He is not human (compare Isaiah 59:17). The descriptions here are appropriate for a king. But whereas a human king might be clothed in "fine linen" (1 Chronicles 15:27) and royal colors (Esther 8:15), God is *clothed with majesty* (compare Psalm 104:1; Isaiah 26:10) and *strength* (compare Psalms 21:1, 13;

How to Say It

Archimedes	Ar-kuh- <i>meed</i> -eez.
Gilgamesh	Gil- <i>guh</i> -mesh.
Marduk	Mar- <i>duke</i> .
pharaohs	<i>fair</i> -oz or <i>fay</i> -roez.
Tetragrammaton	Teh-truh- <i>grah</i> -muh-tawn.
Yahweh (<i>Hebrew</i>)	Yah-weh.

65:6; 105:4). God's character alone is so wonderful to perceive that no further adornment could heighten the experience. His authority in all things rests on himself, not any other trappings of power.

A belt would be *girded* around one's waist (Psalm 45:3). This accessory could hold the robe close to the body or help to gather the bottom part of the robe around and between the top of the legs, allowing free, quick movement. This special preparation for action, especially battle, is what girding oneself signified. In God's case, the action is taken on behalf of His people, to do battle for them. God needs no sword or other weapon to be armed for battle (Hosea 1:7).

What Do You Think?

Why is it important to remember that while God can be described in human terms, He is not?

Digging Deeper

What pitfalls can we avoid when we use many different ways of describing God rather than focusing on only one (e.g., King or Father)?

1b. The world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.

Archimedes (lived about 287–212 BC) is quoted as saying, "Give me the place to stand, and I shall move the world." The mathematician was undoubtedly overly excited about how a fulcrum could be used to shift massive objects. The psalmist would beg to disagree with Archimedes.

The world does not exist on its own but was created by God. It can only be spoken of as *stablished* and immovable because of God's intention for it and His power to accomplish what He wills (compare Psalm 96:10). Should the Lord wish it, all of creation would tremble and fall to pieces. Paul touched on this while preaching in Athens (2 Peter 3:7). God expressed His contentment after He finished creating the world (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), and it is His continuing broad concern for *all* His creation that the psalmist celebrates (example: Matthew 10:29).

B. Without Beginning (v. 2)

2. Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.

Ancient kings were fond of exaggerating the extent of their power and influence (examples: 2 Chronicles 32:10-19; Daniel 4:28-30). Many rulers, like the pharaohs, believed themselves to be direct descendants of the gods, worthy of all the honor and glory associated with that status. Maps from various ancient kingdoms show their own territory as the center of the world. Stories of kingly exploits suggest the king was a larger-than-life mythical hero. For instance, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* recounts the semi-mythical King Gilgamesh's exploits and quest for immortality.

God has no need for exaggeration. In keeping with the royal description in Psalm 93:1a (above), the *throne* is a symbol of a king's authority (examples: Exodus 11:5; Esther 1:2). God's throne is generally understood as being in Heaven (examples: Psalm 103:19; Ezekiel 1:26; Revelation 4), while the earth is considered His footstool (examples: Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 5:34-35; Acts 7:49). One exception to this is the ark of the covenant. As the place where God would meet the high priest, it represented God's throne on earth (Psalm 99:1; compare Exodus 25:10-22; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2). Another possible exception is Zion (Psalm 9:11). Revelation 4 offers an awe-inspiring description of the worship around God's throne in Heaven.

This psalm does not concern itself with where the throne is or any description of it. The most important characteristic of this throne is its ancient—indeed timeless—existence (compare Psalm 55:19). There was never a time when our *everlasting* God was not King. This stands in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern gods who were enthroned by the people each year. God had no need of any human intervention to affirm His kingship.

All else that exists has a beginning, a beginning in God's creative act (John 1:1-3). All else that exists is, therefore, dependent on something else for its existence, namely, on God. But God exists forever, without cause. There can be no greater ruler. The Lord is the world's only King.

Long Live the Queen

In 2022, most Britons experienced something they never had before: the death of their monarch. Queen Elizabeth II had reigned for over 70 years when she died at age 96. For some, her death reignited questions about why Britain should be a constitutional monarchy. For others, this was the end of a glorious era. There was no succession crisis or political upheaval, but still, the people mourned for the figurehead they had lost. Her mere presence, whether appreciated or not, had been a constant for many years.

This feeling resembles the imagery of an eternal throne described in Psalm 93:2. In constitutional monarchies, the reigning monarch symbolizes stability and continuity. Similarly, while a constitution may limit their powers, the inherited position and representation of a long-standing lineage bring comfort and security to people. By drawing this analogy, we can better understand how God, who is eternal and unchanging, offers a constant source of comfort and safety for those who trust in Him. But, of course, the analogy can only go so far. God's reign will never end. In God's kingdom, there is never a question of succession or whether the king still has a vital role to play. He offers true comfort, safety, and stability to His people. How do you celebrate the reign of your King? —O. P.

II. God's Words

(Psalm 93:3-5)

A. Mighty in Power (vv. 3-4)

3. The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

The people of Israel lived in an arid region. Some of their homeland was true desert, but all of it depended on seasonal rains. Most rain fell between November and March, with very little from June to September. This climate lent itself to *wadis*, a term that can refer to seasonal creeks that are sometimes dry or to small year-round brooks. In Hebrew, the word translated *floods* can refer to either variety of river (examples: Genesis 2:10, 13-14; Joshua 1:4; 2 Samuel 8:3). These wadis

were prone to flash flooding and could suddenly become violent, rushing torrents, sweeping away anything in their banks. The image here is likely of a swollen, violent river in the midst of flooding. Jesus used this image in His parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matthew 7:24-27): the sand is a foolish place to build because it marks the bed of a seasonal river.

The heaping up of flood imagery (*lifted up, lifted up their voice, lift up their waves*) emphasizes the ferocity of the water. We might hear in this frightening, rising tide echoes of Noah's flood (Genesis 6-9). Far from the peaceful sound of an afternoon shower, these floods raised a cacophony.

What Do You Think?

If you were contextualizing Psalm 93 for your current hometown, what natural force might you refer to as particularly destructive?

Digging Deeper

Does thinking about this image in terms of your context enhance your grasp of this psalm? How, or why not?

4. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

The imagery seems to shift from floods to *the sea*, though the concepts are used in parallel to one another, building on the same idea. For the people of Israel and others in the ancient Near East, the Mediterranean Sea was familiar, as it formed the western boundary of the promised land (examples: Exodus 23:31; Numbers 34:6). Familiarity did not breed comfort, however. Water, especially the sea in the ancient Near East, often represented chaos. The sea was powerful and unpredictable. It was home to giant creatures. Its waves and storms posed a mortal danger to those who dared to sail upon it.

Though a river might not typically evoke the same sense of danger, a *flooded* river surely would. The danger of water, whether by flooding or violent *waves of the sea*, is not *the noise* of it, though

this can be greatly alarming. But compared to God's might, the *many waters* could be described with Shakespearean language: "[They are] full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (*Macbeth*). The Lord separated the waters at the beginning, creating order where there had been only chaos (Genesis 1:1-2, 6-10). He commands the waves to be still (Psalms 65:7; 107:23-30) and stay within the boundaries He sets (Job 38:8-11; Psalm 104:7-9). Indeed, He commands the waters to sustain the creatures He has made (104:10-18), and He rules over the mighty creatures of the deep oceans (104:24-28). Little wonder that Jesus demonstrated His divine nature and power by stilling storms to protect His vulnerable disciples, or that they exclaimed in wonder that the one who stills the storm must be the Son of God (Matthew 14:33; Mark 4:35-41).

What Do You Think?

Considering how you recontextualized verse 3, how can remembering God's power over that force help you trust Him more?

Digging Deeper

How can you share this confidence with others as the psalmist shared his with us?

Can You Hear Him?

Nothing can replace the local congregation with its preaching, teaching, discipleship, and fellowship. Even so, a good podcast can be an enriching supplement. What if, instead of listening to the radio, you found a podcast of daily devotions, historical information about biblical history, or interviews with Christian leaders? You might find podcasts a valuable medium for attuning your ear to God rather than the noise of the world.

Just as the waters in Psalm 93:3 lifted up their voices, so the cacophony of our world can become overwhelming. But God's voice cuts through whatever chaos we encounter. As you navigate life's mighty waves, what helps you listen for God every day?
—O. P.

B. Great in Holiness (v. 5)

5a. Thy testimonies are very sure.

We might think the final verse decisively moves away from nature to civilization. But this is a distinction the psalmist would not make. The same laws and *testimonies* that ordered the waters also created order for God's people. God's word went forth and created an ordered world (Genesis 1:1-27); God's laws taught the Israelites how to coexist both with one another and with the land that God granted them (see Deuteronomy 4:40).

Two laws regarding rest illustrate how God's care for people could also overlap significantly with His care for animals and the wider creation. Every seven years, the land was to be allowed to grow wild without cultivation. Doing so allowed the land to replenish itself through natural processes while also providing food for the poor *and* for wild animals. And on every seventh day, the people were to observe the Sabbath and rest along with any foreigners, slaves, and animals in their midst (Exodus 23:10-12).

The Lord's testimonies are not like those of unreliable humans, who often either do not know the truth or alter it to fit their own interests. God's word is not like that of human kings, who twist the truth with words to magnify their power. God's word is *sure*, firm like a huge stone, unmovable even in the greatest flood.

5b. Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

Like the robe and the throne (Psalm 93:1-2, above), the ancient king's *house* was intended to demonstrate the extent of his wealth and power. In Israel, Solomon's palace became legendary for its grandeur (1 Kings 7:1-12). And the physical temple that Solomon built to be the Lord's *house* was a beautiful structure (6:2-36; 8:13). The temple was not truly God's house until He filled it with His glory to such a degree that the priests could not minister there because of it (8:4-11; compare Exodus 3:5). A *house* could also refer to the family within the home (examples: Genesis 12:1; 2 Samuel 3:6).

As Solomon acknowledged at the temple's dedication (1 Kings 8:27), God's primary residence is not the temple. For that reason, it is

appropriate that the psalmist did not describe God's house by its literal building materials, such as cedar or gold. Instead, it is defined by *holiness*, one of God's core attributes (Revelation 4:8). One aspect of holiness is uniqueness. When we speak of the holiness of God's people, we often talk about being "set apart" in the sense of being dedicated to following the Lord (Exodus 19:6; Ephesians 1:3-4). This includes seeking to live by His laws and grow into His likeness (see Romans 8:9).

Given the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 BC, *for ever* cannot refer to the longevity of the temple in Jerusalem. God's throne is in Heaven, so we can appropriately consider that His home (examples: 1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 11:4). And some psalms celebrate all of creation as God's habitation (examples: 24:1; 33:5; 47:2, 7), emphasizing that no place (and no people) are outside of His concern. Those of us who follow Christ are also now God's house in a spiritual sense (1 Peter 2:4-5), as the Holy Spirit forms us into His people in the likeness of Jesus. Knowing that collectively and individually, we are His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19), we commit ourselves to reflect His glory wherever we are, whatever we do. Wherever God chooses to reside, that place is holy.

What Do You Think?

What emphasis does your congregation place on holiness?

Digging Deeper

To what degree is holiness attributed to us versus a state believers seek to attain? Provide scriptural evidence for your answer.

Conclusion

A. Praise to the King!

As we look to God as King, we recognize His powerful authority over all that He created. He is greater than any threat. Given the Lord's majestic and holy reign, how should we join the psalmist in worship? We too express our wonder at what God has done simply because of who He



Visual for Lesson 7. Point to this visual as the class discusses the questions associated with verse 3.

is. We celebrate in song and in deed the rightness of being part of God's kingdom. We express our submission to His authority by following His teaching and example, living according to His great love, especially as revealed in Jesus. We extol God's power by relying on Him to provide for us and protect us, emboldened by His Spirit to serve others as He has served us. In this, we honor our King.

What Do You Think?

What is your most surprising takeaway from studying Psalm 93?

Digging Deeper

How can that insight be applied in your life this week?

B. Prayer

O Lord Almighty, You are majestic in strength and holiness. We are greatly blessed because of Your care for us and Your creation. We put our trust in You because Your reign is sure, and Your words are true. As we are reminded of Your inestimable majesty, we ask You to strengthen and guide us to live under Your reign so all may know You are the world's true king. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Lord reigns!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Challenge learners to work in pairs to write a short poem. Three suggested forms are a couplet (two rhyming lines), a haiku (three lines with 5-7-5 syllables), or a free verse (four lines with no rhyme or rhythm but with repetition or personification). *Option.* Provide a theme for learners to all focus on; love and nature are both good starting options.

Allow five minutes to work, then ask volunteers to share their poems with the group. Have them talk about their writing process. What was challenging? What benefit is there in using a poetic form to express praise to God?

Alternative 1. Bring a copy of one of your favorite short poems to class. Have a volunteer read it aloud. Invite learners to point out words, rhymes, or repetitions that stand out and explain why they are important to the poem.

Alternative 2. Ask learners to divide into two groups. One will be pro-poetry, arguing its merits. The other will be anti-poetry, arguing its deficits. Allow about 10 minutes for groups to brainstorm an opening statement, several key points, and a closing statement. After the debate, ask the class to discuss in pairs how their perception of poetry in general does or does not affect how they value poetry (like the psalms) in the Bible.

Say, “Poetry can help us see things in a new way. When we creatively play with words, we can spark other people’s imagination and draw attention to, or emphasize, valuable truths they may not have considered before. Today’s passage of Scripture is a poem; as you read it, pay attention to what images it brings to your mind and what truths it reminds you of.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 93 while other learners sit still and listen. Ask another volunteer

to reread the psalm, but this time, allow learners to jot down any words or phrases that jump out to them. Allow a few minutes for pairs to discuss their initial reactions to this psalm.

Split the class into two groups: the **Majesty Group** and the **Strength Group**. Have both groups reread the psalm together and determine which images or phrases in the verse fit with the theme of their group, either majesty or strength. While the class works, draw a simple Venn diagram on the board (two circles with some overlap), labeling one circle “Majesty” and the other “Strength.” After several minutes, bring the class back together. Ask the groups to share what images/phrases they identified with their theme. Write any shared answers between the circles. Once the groups are finished answering, discuss what overlaps (if any) they saw and what this suggests about God’s majesty and strength.

Alternative. Divide the class into pairs and distribute copies of the “The Lord, the King” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow time for the pairs to complete the exercise as indicated. Then, discuss their findings as a class.

Into Life

Give each learner one minute to consider Psalm 93 and find the verse from this short psalm that most resonates with him or her today. Invite volunteers to share their responses. Then, challenge each learner to brainstorm a short plan to keep this verse in mind in the week ahead. *Option.* Distribute the “My Key Verse” exercise from the activity page to be worked on individually as directed before discussing with a partner.

Ask learners what praise choruses Psalm 93 reminds them of. If you have a musically inclined class, choose a well-known chorus to sing together. Close class with a prayer praising God for His majesty and holiness.

The Lord Is Active

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 66:1-14
Background Scripture: Psalm 103

Psalm 103:1-14

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

2 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

5 Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

9 He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever.

10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.



Key Text

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. —Psalm 103:6

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Give the reasons for praising the Lord in today's text.
2. Explain the importance of considering the history of God's work when anticipating His future work.
3. Write a prayer that celebrates God's character as the source of blessings.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. God's Wide Mercy
- B. Lesson Context

I. Call to Worship (Psalm 103:1-5)

- A. What to Do (vv. 1-2)
- B. Why to Do It (vv. 3-5)

II. Acknowledge Divine Grace (Psalm 103:6-14)

- A. Facts to Consider (vv. 6-10)
Like Father, Like Son?
How God Works
- B. Analogies to Ponder (vv. 11-14)

Conclusion

- A. God Knows Us!
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. God's Wide Mercy

Frederick Faber was a nineteenth-century preacher, theologian, and hymn-writer. Probably his most famous hymn was "Faith of Our Fathers." Less known is his "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy." The latter hymn reminds those singing it that God's mercy is like the wideness of the sea. The lyrics connect God's love, mercy, kindness, and grace.

We may wonder how we can let others see those aspects of God's character in us in an increasingly post-Christian (or anti-Christian) culture. We wonder whether our reflection of God's merciful character traits will be interpreted as approval of ungodly behavior. We might begin to answer these questions by taking inventory of the mercies we have received as individuals and congregations. Psalm 103 will help us do so.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Psalms is often described as "ancient Israel's hymnal." Like hymnals today, the book of Psalms includes contributions by different authors and covers a wide span of time. The oldest psalm is by Moses (Psalm 90), and at least one psalm comes out of the setting of the captivity of God's people in Babylon (Psalm 137). These chronological bookends are separated by some 900 years!

About half of the psalms are attributed to King David, known as the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1). Today's passage is one of those psalms. While some psalms include a superscription that provides the setting (example: Psalm 51), there is no such background recorded for Psalm 103. It simply notes the association with David, who reigned about 1010–970 BC.

The Psalter is traditionally seen as falling into five sub-books, their divisions being Psalms 1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150. Psalm 103 is located within the fourth of those five. A broad brush look at the 17 chapters of this sub-book reveals the following:

* Psalms 90–100 speak of God's role as king of the universe and ancient Israel's role in announc-

ing and celebrating His reign (examples: 93:1; 95:3; 96:6, 10; 97:1; 99:1).

* Psalms 101–106 speak of the people’s responsibilities in various ways and tell Israel’s story in ways that challenge complacency. Psalms 103 (today’s text) and 104 fit within this grouping, as they encourage readers to continue being a community of praise.

I. Call to Worship

(Psalm 103:1-5)

A. What to Do (vv. 1-2)

1a. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

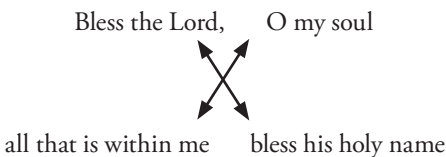
The word *bless* translates a Hebrew word that overlaps in meaning with other Hebrew words. Psalm 104:35 is particularly interesting in this regard. Its translation, “Bless thou the Lord, O my soul. Praise ye the Lord,” reveals that the different words translated “bless” and “praise” overlap in meaning, following the practice of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Reflecting that fact seems to be the intent of the psalmist.

Other words in this same grouping that reflect the imperative to *bless the Lord* include those translated “glorify” in Psalm 22:23, “magnify” and “exalt” in 34:3, and “extol” in 68:4. All speak of lifting worship to the only one who is worthy of it.

The phrase *O my soul* reveals the individualistic, personal element of the psalmist’s self-challenge. We see this reflected further in the half-verse that follows.

1b. And all that is within me, bless his holy name.

The second half of verse 1 stands parallel to the first half. The parallel elements are arranged in an X-shaped pattern like this:



Unlike the verse before us, the phrase “bless the Lord” repeated in the last three verses of Psalm 103 (not in today’s text) is decisively plural. What

the psalmist finds appropriate for himself applies equally to his fellow Israelites. But he begins with self. A life of regular, sincere worship draws us closer to God. The fact that God’s *name* is *holy* hints that we are to be so as well (compare Genesis 1:26-27; 1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2).

2a. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

The first half of this verse is identical to the first half of verse 1, just considered in both Hebrew and English.

2b. And forget not all his benefits.

The second half of verse 2 adds a negative imperative alongside the positive one of Psalm 103:1b. Worship of God includes, even requires, an accurate recall of who God is and what He has done (compare Psalm 77:11). Forgetfulness in this regard—whether intentional or otherwise—invites God’s wrath (compare Deuteronomy 6:12; 9:7; Judges 3:7-8; 1 Samuel 12:9; etc.). The history of ancient Israel testifies relentlessly to the fact that forgetfulness is a precursor to sin and apostasy.

The Hebrew word translated *benefits* occurs four times in the Psalter. In the other three places, its sense is decidedly negative (Psalms 28:4; 94:2; 137:8). Putting those three negative senses alongside the positive one here, the idea is that the faithful person should remember that God sorts out the effects of human behavior, blessing those who strive toward righteousness and visiting wrath on the wicked.

What Do You Think?

How does blessing the Lord guard against forgetting what we ought to remember about Him?

Digging Deeper

What daily habits can you cultivate to bless the Lord continually?

B. Why to Do It (vv. 3-5)

3. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases.

The next several verses feature a series of action verbs that describe how God relates to humanity. The psalmist begins by speaking of the completeness of God’s works toward humanity as He deals

with both issues of the spirit (*iniquities*) and the body (*diseases*). This combination does not necessarily argue that sin causes disease (or vice versa). God-as-healer is a major theme in the Psalter (examples: Psalms 6:2; 30:2; 107:20; 147:3).

4. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

In a general, abstract sense, we want two things for our lives: (1) we want to avoid negative things that take us down, and (2) we want to embrace positive things that move us forward. The verse before us specifies that God is the key in both areas. He's not a one-dimensional god, as are the fictitious deities of paganism. The word *crowneth* also appears in the past tense in Psalm 8:5, and its cross-connection with Hebrews 2:7 is interesting and insightful.

5. Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

God provides abundantly. Two extraordinary features of food are its sheer variety and the forms of enjoyment it gives when not consumed to excess (Proverbs 23:2, 21). This bounty is an important symbol of God's goodness (compare Psalm 23:5).

Various comparisons with eagles occur about two dozen times in the Old Testament. The image projected is almost always one of strength or capability (examples: Exodus 19:4; 2 Samuel 1:23; Job 39:27; Isaiah 40:31).

What Do You Think?

Which blessing in Psalm 103:3-5 is most evident in your life today?

Digging Deeper

If all these blessings seem lacking, can you assume you are being punished? Why or why not? Cite verses that support your answer.

II. Acknowledge Divine Grace

(Psalm 103:6-14)

A. Facts to Consider (vv. 6-10)

6. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

The series of action verbs continues, extending

the ideas of the two previous verses. The characteristic actions or concepts of *righteousness* and *judgment* are closely related, coupled as we see here about 50 times in the Old Testament (examples: Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 5:16; Jeremiah 9:24).

God expects the way He supports *all that are oppressed* to be a guide to how the Israelites were to do so as well (examples: Psalm 106:3; Isaiah 5:7; Jeremiah 22:3). This expectation is no less important in the New Testament era (John 16:8; Acts 24:25).

Like Father, Like Son?

A promotional video from the 1960s features a series of short sketches where a father is doing something his young son imitates. First, it's the father painting the house, with the son imitating the brush strokes. Then it's the father washing the car, with the son imitating the same. Finally, the man reaches for his pack of cigarettes to light one up. As he does so, the son reaches for the pack, and the ominous voice-over intones, "Like father, like son?"

Human fathers don't always set the best example. But our heavenly Father does! And the emphasis He puts on something determines our priorities. Consider His actions of ensuring *righteousness* and *judgment*. These aren't just idle descriptions of His character; they set an example for us to follow. In what way can you please God this week by doing so? —R. L. N.

7a. He made known his ways unto Moses.

We come now to the conclusion of the series of action verbs begun in Psalm 103:3. What is different here is that the verbs shift from what God was doing in the psalmist's present to what God did in Israel's beginnings *via Moses*. The fact that humans lived hundreds of years before the psalmist (David) reveals God's consistency. He *made known his* unchanging *ways* in giving His law at Sinai. Those laws were to guide the path of redeemed lives.

7b. His acts unto the children of Israel.

As the second half of the verse points out, the words of the Torah are not merely words to live by. They also use *acts* by God as a model for *the children of Israel* for those requirements (examples:

Leviticus 19:2; Exodus 20:11). We have heard of people who don't "practice what they preach." That may be true of humans, but it is never true of God!

8. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

This verse deepens the psalm's connection to the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt. The verse at hand quotes Exodus 34:6, probably the verse of the Old Testament most quoted within the Old Testament itself (examples: Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalm 145:8; Jonah 4:2; compare James 5:11).

In its historical context, the quoted verse comes after the notorious episode of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Moses pled for the people, asking God to forgive their idolatry and accompany them to the promised land. Thanks to Moses' intervention, God agreed to begin again with the people, as though their idolatry had never happened. By leading with patience and forgiveness, God made it possible for Israel to survive and, eventually, to flourish. And by reaffirming that great truth, the psalmist reminds the reader that the divine-human relationship rests on God's mercy, not human merit.

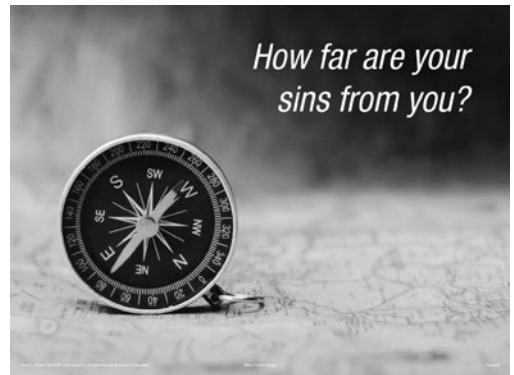
9. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever.

The thoughts of this verse are also reflected in numerous other passages (compare Psalm 30:5; Isaiah 57:16; Jeremiah 3:5, 12; Micah 7:18). God's judgment of sin does not cancel out His mercy, and even times of punishment cannot be the last word (the notable exception is Jude 13).

Regarding a connection with Isaiah 57:16, that verse is part of a more extensive discussion of sin and redemption in which the prophet both notes how oppressed people can be, as well as the need for God to intervene on their behalf (Isaiah 56:9–59:21). God indeed does punish the guilty. However, He wants mercy to triumph as people repent (2 Peter 3:9). All this is reflected in the prophets' relentless message, which can be summed up in three words: *Repent!*

10. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Once again, the parallelism that characterizes so much of Hebrew poetry is observed: the phrase



Visual for Lesson 8. While discussing verse 12, ask learners to consider reasons for the psalmist's confidence that God had removed "our" transgressions.

bath not dealt with us expresses the same thought as *rewarded us*. The phrase *after our sins* expresses the same idea as *according to our iniquities*. Good news bears repeating! This verse does just that as it summarizes the previous observations about God's mercy. The clearest evidence of that mercy is how He deals with sin: the punishment is less than the sin deserves. Were He to treat sinners immediately as we deserve, our situation would be hopeless. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130:3–4).

A temptation might be to think of punishment-tempered-by-mercy in terms of "striking the right balance." But we should be cautious about our conclusions here. God's two primary attributes are His *holiness* (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8) and His *love* (1 John 4:8, 16). The fact that He is utterly holy requires that our unholiness (sin) be punished; the fact that He is love results in a delay of punishment so that sinners have time to repent (2 Peter 3). Furthermore, God's unmerited kindness guides an individual toward repentance (see Romans 2:4).

It's not a "right balance" in terms of God's actions being 50 percent sin-punishing holiness and 50 percent merciful love. Rather, when viewed across the entirety of salvation-history, God's actions reveal themselves to be 100 percent in line with His holiness and 100 percent in line with His love. The requirements of both His holiness and

His love ultimately are met in the death of Jesus on the cross. When sin's penalty was paid there, the requirements of God's holiness and love were both satisfied to the full (John 3:16; Romans 3:25-26).

How God Works

I heard a loud crash from the room where my daughter was playing, and I ran to see what had happened. Entering the room, I saw her standing before a pile of rubble that had once been ceramic figurines and handmade art projects. Their shelf lay on top of them. "I don't know what happened, Mom! It just fell off the wall!" my daughter exclaimed.

As we began the clean-up process, I told her that accidents happen. And we went back to our separate activities.

A few minutes later, she emerged from the room with a contrite look. "I have to tell you something. It didn't just fall off the wall," she said. "I was jumping, and I knocked it down." While I was unhappy that my daughter had lied to me, her obvious shame and regret went to my heart; I forgave her.

We have read thus far that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." As we repent, He forgives and does not reward us "according to our iniquities." Do you forgive as God forgives you? See Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:32; and Colossians 3:13. See also the next two verses in our text. —L. M. W.

B. Analogies to Ponder (vv. 11-14)

11-12. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

These two verses allow us to explore the concept of parallelism a bit deeper since there is more than one kind. Many instances of parallelism are easily recognizable as *synonymous parallels*, where the two lines under consideration say about the same thing using different words. That's the kind of parallelism we see in verse 10, above.

But now, we encounter what is called *alternate parallelism*. Rather than featuring the two lines of synonymous parallelism, an alternate parallel has

four lines. Those four lines alternate as the third line repeats the first line in some way, and the fourth line repeats the second line. To the ancient mind, the distance between *heaven* and *earth* (the first line) is as incalculable as the distance between *east* and *west* (the third line). These two lines begin two analogies completed by the second and fourth lines as the psalmist marvels that *so great is his mercy* and that *so far hath he removed our transgressions*, respectively.

These features help us understand the text as the original writer intended. The ancient Israelites knew of the possibility of long journeys (compare Genesis 28:14; Jonah 1:1-3; etc.). But they also "knew what they did not know": there was more to encounter beyond where any Israelite had personally traveled, either to the east or the west. Likewise, the ancient Israelites knew certain things about the relationship between heaven and earth (compare Genesis 11:4; 28:12; Ecclesiastes 5:2; etc.). But again, they also "knew what they did not know," as the psalmist uses that fact to marvel at the incomprehensibility of God's removal of sin.

What Do You Think?

What role should guilt or shame play in the life of someone whose sins are so far removed?

Digging Deeper

How would you encourage someone who still struggles with these feelings after receiving God's forgiveness?

13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

The Hebrew verb translated *pitieth* is also translated "have mercy" in Psalm 102:13 and "had compassion" in 2 Kings 13:23, and that is the sense here. God shows the sort of compassionate mercy to us that a good parent does to a child. Parents gently educate, correct, guide, and encourage. The image of God as *a father* also appears in the Torah (Deuteronomy 1:30-31), wisdom literature (Proverbs 3:11-12), the prophets (Malachi 3:17-18), and the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:18). Those texts mention God's fatherhood

as a way of calling the people to reconsider the direction of their lives. In Psalm 103, however, the emphasis is slightly different. Remembering that God works as a parent should comfort the reader in times of distress (compare Galatians 3:26–4:7).

What Do You Think?

What wrong ideas have you heard about what it means to fear God?

Digging Deeper

What does it mean to fear God as His children?

14. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

The Hebrew word translated *frame* occurs nine times in the Old Testament (here and in Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Deuteronomy 31:21; 1 Chronicles 28:9; 29:18; Isaiah 26:3; 29:16; Habakkuk 2:18). In six of those other passages, the word speaks of a person's frame of mind; in two passages, the idea is that of someone's physical being.

The latter would also seem to be the case here if the word *dust* is taken to be a synonymous parallel with *frame*. This conclusion is entirely consistent with the fact of the creation of humans in Genesis 2:7. There, in the word *formed*, we find the verb form of the noun *frame*. The Creator knows His creation.

Moreover, God's mercy reflects His awareness of our limits. The fact that our bodies decay into dirt results from our limited life spans. God works with due regard for our limitations.

What Do You Think?

What encouragement can you experience knowing that God remembers our limitations as creatures?

Digging Deeper

What freedom might you experience if you remembered our human limitations?

Conclusion

A. God Knows Us!

Psalm 103 insists that God knows us. And because of that knowledge, He is compassion-

ate toward us. This cause-and-effect may be surprising because knowledge of another person's limitations can lead to estrangement, anger, disappointment, or even hatred. Those negative consequences present themselves because of our limited commitment to virtue and capacity for love. The contrast between the consequences of our knowledge and the consequences of God's knowledge could hardly be greater.

The amazing thing is that God's mercy creates the space in which we can come to know ourselves, each other, and even God. In Psalm 103, this commitment to merciful knowledge comes out in its reference to the story of the golden calf episode in Exodus 32–34. There, both God and Moses know the Israelites to be a stubborn and sinful people. Yet that knowledge should be cast against the backdrop of years of Egyptian enslavement as they try to cope with unexpected freedoms.

Psalm 103 and the texts that undergird it point to a different approach to the life of faith than we sometimes hear. These texts anticipate that life will be filled with signs of God's mercy. How would others see such signs in you?

B. Prayer

O God of mercy, You have given us every breath we have. You have taught us to think, question, wonder, and even protest when the world does not go as You intend. Hear our prayers for Your world as You have heard them in the past. Teach us a little more daily about Your compassion for all human beings, and may we be Your hands and feet in that regard. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Expect signs of God's mercy.
Be one yourself.

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh- <i>losh</i> -unz.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter- <i>ahn</i> -uh-me.
Ephesians	Ee- <i>fee</i> -zhunz.
Leviticus	Leh- <i>vit</i> -ih-kus.
Torah (<i>Hebrew</i>)	<i>Tor</i> -uh.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have these two questions written on the board as learners arrive:

*Who is someone you admire but you do not know personally, and who is not a public figure?
What is it about that person's life that you find admirable and worth emulating?*

Use these two questions to stimulate a few minutes of free discussion.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “My Favorite Person of Action” exercise from the activity pages, which you can download. Give participants no more than one minute to complete the activity as indicated. Allow time for several volunteers to share their responses.

After either activity, say, “It is pretty easy for us to praise those people who actively do right. But how often do we do that to the exclusion of praising the Lord for His actions? Today’s text may convict us in that regard.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 103:1-5. Focusing on the word *benefits* in verse 2, form small groups to (1) identify benefits mentioned in these five verses and (2) identify benefits that class members have experienced over and above those in the text.

After no more than 10 minutes, lead a whole-class discussion of the groups’ conclusions. (*Option.* As a third task, challenge groups to recall a story in the Bible that demonstrates benefits in the text.)

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 103:6-10. Assign three groups specific verses: verses 6-8, 9, and 10, one per group. Task groups to answer this question: “What does your verse or range of verses tell us about the character of God?”

Have groups summarize their thoughts in no more than three words for sharing with the class

in ensuing whole-class discussion. Jot those summary words on the board under the heading *The Lord is . . .* Then lead the class in declaring these things and praising Him for them. Example: “The Lord is compassionate—praise the Lord!”

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 103:11-14. Assign small groups or study pairs one verse each to think of additional word pictures or analogies to explain these truths to a small child.

Allow time for discussion and sharing.

Option 1. Using smartphones, have learners locate astral images taken by space telescopes. Compare and contrast the stated distance of the various stellar objects discovered. Ask learners how the psalmist might have phrased Psalm 103:11 differently had he known what we now know about astral distances. Encourage free discussion.

Option 2. Distribute copies of “The Active Lord, Doubly Described” exercise from the activity page. Announce that this simple matching exercise is a closed-Bible speed drill to be completed individually as indicated. The time limit is one minute. Assure your participants that they will score their own results, that you will not collect them, nor will you put anyone on the spot to reveal their score.

If you think your learners will need more than one minute to complete this, save it to the end of class and distribute it as a take-home.

Into Life

Refer back to the board and the benefits and characteristics of God listed there. Invite participants into a time of open prayer, in which they can express their praise to the Lord.

Encourage participants to write a prayer in the week ahead that celebrates God as the source of blessings. Ask that they bring their prayers with them to class next week so that you can share them with everyone.

The Lord Is Righteous

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 12:18-29
Background Scripture: Psalm 145

Psalm 145:1, 10-21

1 I will extol thee, my God, O king, and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.

10 All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD, and thy saints shall bless thee.

11 They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power,

12 To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

13 Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

14 The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

15 The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season.

16 Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

18 The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

19 He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him. He also will hear their cry, and will save them.

20 The LORD preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will he destroy.

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.



Key Text

Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.
—Psalm 145:13

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify instances of Hebrew poetic parallelism in Psalm 145.
2. Explain the significance of those parallels.
3. Write a prayer that mimics the Hebrew parallelism of Psalm 145 and shares its themes.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Responding to Wonder
- B. Lesson Context

I. Praiseworthy God, Part 1 (Psalm 145:1, 10-13)

- A. What's So! (vv. 1, 10-12)
Contagious . . . in a Good Way
- B. So What? (v. 13)

II. Compassionate God (Psalm 145:14-20)

- A. Strengthens and Provides (vv. 14-16)
Our Generous God
- B. Willing and Able (vv. 17-20)

III. Praiseworthy God, Part 2 (Psalm 145:21)

Conclusion

- A. Psalm 145 in the Psalter
- B. Psalm 145 in Life
- C. Thought to Remember
- D. Prayer

Introduction

A. Responding to Wonder

We know of great preachers and prolific writers, but can someone be both and do them well? John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) was one who could. A tribute to his preaching skills is the second part of his name, which isn't a "last name" as we have today. Rather, the designation *Chrysostom* is a combination of two Greek words that mean "golden mouth"—an acknowledgment of the persuasiveness of his preaching.

John Chrysostom is recognized today as one of the "early church fathers" who were influential in the fourth century AD. The power of his influence was rooted not just in his preaching but also in his writings. More than 350 of his works exist today, one of which is a commentary on Psalm 145, today's text.

In that commentary, John stated, "Since you have a great Lord, be uplifted yourself and rid yourself of this world's affairs. Adopt a purpose which is superior to the lowliness of the present existence." He exhorted his audiences in Antioch and Constantinople, which included powerful political leaders, to remember the greatness of God and their smallness in comparison. Recognizing God's greatness would put their own lives into a proper context. John's counsel is just as appropriate today.

B. Lesson Context

Psalm 145, today's text, is an acrostic. That means that each line, verse, or section starts with a word that begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. There are nine psalms that are acrostic in nature, the other eight being Psalms 10, 25, 34, 37, 9–10, 111, 112, and 119. (Psalms 9 and 10 count as one because the acrostic spans both; see discussion in lesson 6.) Other acrostics in the Bible are Proverbs 31:10-31 and the entire book of Lamentations. Regarding the latter, notice that chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 have 22 verses each and that chapter 3 has 66 verses, which is a multiple of 22.

A sharp eye will notice that Psalm 145 has only 21 verses. So why the mismatch with the

22-letter Hebrew alphabet? It comes down to an uncertainty in the ancient manuscripts. In most of those manuscripts, Psalm 145:13 lacks a line of text that would have included the absent Hebrew letter. This was noticed in antiquity, and the ancient Greek translation of the Bible, known as the Septuagint (translated at least 200 years before Christ), includes an extra line between verses 13 and 14; see more on this in the commentary below.

Last week’s lesson noted that the 150 chapters of the Psalms are traditionally seen as a collection of five sub-books. Within the fifth of those sub-books, Psalm 145 is the final chapter before the extended coda of Psalms 146–150 begins.

I. Praiseworthy God, Part 1

(Psalm 145:1, 10-13)

A. What’s So! (vv. 1, 10-12)

1. I will extol thee, my God, O king, and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.

Other lessons from the Psalms this quarter have introduced us to *parallelism* as a feature of Hebrew poetry. We saw last week in Psalm 103:1 that there are various synonyms or near-synonyms that express the concept of *bles*. That fact continues to hold true here in Psalm 145:1, as we see the words *extol* and *bles* alongside the words *bles* and *praise* in the verse that follows (which is not included in today’s lesson text). See also Psalm 34:1.

The psalm’s opening phrase *I will extol thee* is repeated exactly in the original language, in Psalm 30:1. A slight divergence between the two texts is seen in the next phrase: the text we are studying is directed toward *my God, O king*, while 30:1 has “O Lord.” They are clearly one and the same!

God’s actions can be categorized in three ways: He creates, rules, and redeems. In proclaiming

God as his king, the psalmist acknowledges the second of those three. The psalmist invites the reader to consider God’s character as good and powerful in that regard.

What Do You Think?

What do psalms in general teach you about exalting the Lord as king?

Digging Deeper

What actions take our exaltation of God out of the realm of mere words?

10. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD, and thy saints shall bless thee.

The phrase *all thy works* expands the scope beyond merely Israel and the entirety of humankind to encompass the inanimate elements of creation. The praise of God concerns all aspects of the universe (see Psalms 8 and 19). The *saints* are those who live in solidarity with both God and other people. They see themselves as carrying a responsibility for others, owing others respect, care, and concern shown in tangible actions. Those who live in such a way find room for praising God, even during difficult times, and those sincerely praising God have no problem being loyal to other people.

Contagious . . . in a Good Way

Rome’s Sistine Chapel is celebrated for its awe-inspiring frescoes, painted by the famous artist Michelangelo (1475–1564). This grand structure embodies the theme of praise and exaltation of God through various visual images. The chapel’s architecture, characterized by its attention to detail, exudes a sense of the magnificence and grandeur of God. Visitors can’t help but be caught up in the motifs that overwhelm the senses—it’s contagious!

We may say the same about David’s intent when he wrote Psalm 145. Does it have that effect on you? If not, why? —O. P.

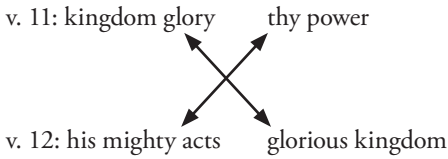
11-12. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power. To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.

We group these two verses because they

How to Say It

Antioch	An-tee-ock.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Habakkuk	Huh-back-kuk.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.

illustrate an X-shaped parallel construction similar to what we saw in last week’s lesson. It is visualized this way:



Glory is an attribute belonging to God (see Exodus 16:7; Deuteronomy 5:24; John 17:5). By extension, it also belongs to His *kingdom*. But we may ask ourselves, *Who can be in this glorious kingdom besides God?* In one sense, only those included in “the saints” of the previous verse are or will be kingdom-citizens (compare Philippians 3:20; etc.). In a broader sense, however, we see this declaration in Psalm 103:19: “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.” There is only one ultimate king, and the rule of His kingdom is not limited. Satan has his own kingdom (Matthew 12:26), but in the end, it is temporary. People, both ancient and modern, also set themselves on the thrones of their hearts to be self-kingdoms or kingdoms-of-one; that is folly as well (Isaiah 14:13-15; Daniel 4:28-32; Ezekiel 28:2-3; etc.).

God’s all-encompassing kingdom does not equate to a human political structure (see John 18:36). Even so, we humans have God-ordained roles to play in it. One of those roles is found in the phrases *they shall speak . . . and talk*. This speaking and talking isn’t aimless chatter; rather, it aims to make God and His kingdom known to others. We don’t talk about God’s kingdom only amongst ourselves. We make His kingdom known to the whole world.

Verse 12 largely restates verse 11—that’s the nature of this X-shaped parallel. But verse 12 clarifies the subject of the faithful people’s communication: they should speak of God’s specific deeds, as in the recital of the saving acts of the exodus in Psalms 78, 105, and 136. The people also are to speak of God’s work in their personal lives, as do many psalms of praise. The *mighty acts* keep occurring because God’s mercy never ceases.

B. So What? (v. 13)

13. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.

The psalmist understood that God’s rule extends beyond any given moment or era. The New Testament writers understood this as well (1 Timothy 1:17; 2 Peter 1:11). While all earthly things pass away, God’s merciful concern for His creation does not.

The Lesson Context above mentions that a small text may have shifted elsewhere in the ancient manuscripts, leaving the acrostic of this poetry one letter short in the Hebrew alphabet. Right here is where the line would be placed. The ancient Greek version (the Septuagint) does indeed include that segment. It reads, “The Lord is faithful in his words, and holy in all his works.”

II. Compassionate God

(Psalm 145:14-20)

A. Strengthens and Provides (vv. 14-16)

14. The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down.

Parallelism in thoughts continues. Even so, this verse shows extra poetic creativity. The original words translated *upholdeth* and *fall* are quite common in the Old Testament in general and the Psalms in particular. By contrast, the word translated *raiseth up* is rare, occurring only here and in Psalm 146:8 in the entire Old Testament.

But the primary challenge concerns the word translated *bowed down*, which is found only here and in Psalm 148:6; Isaiah 57:6; 58:5; and Micah 6:6. Reading all the texts that have “bowed down” reveals that the word doesn’t have the same meaning in all contexts. There seem to be two possibilities: it refers to great distress or a posture of worship. Which of these does the writer of Psalm 145 intend? Is the one “bowed down” humbled by negative life experiences, or does the person seek to worship God?

A third possibility is that the ambiguity is deliberate, with the psalm pointing us to both meanings being intended. In that case, the message would be that whatever experiences bring

us humbly to God will result in our ultimate benefit.

15-16. The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

The parallelism continues as these two verses make essentially the same point but in different ways. The psalmist describes worshippers almost as children waiting for a parent to give them something they need. They recognize that all people, indeed *every living thing*, depend on God similarly. That is true even if not everyone recognizes it as truth. God graciously feeds all. This idea underlies Jesus' statement that it rains on the just and unjust alike, with both benefiting from the life-giving things God bestows on them (see Matthew 5:45).

Meat refers to food in general, which God provides in due time. The text does not promise wealth, and a spiritually mature person would not expect God to be a purveyor of such. But God does give us what we need (compare Psalms 104:27-28; 136:25). To open the *hand* implies giving a gift. God's gifts may go beyond the bare essentials to things that bring appropriate forms of pleasure.

What Do You Think?

In times of scarcity, what gives you confidence to wait for God's timing for provision?

Digging Deeper

When would it be appropriate to reference this verse to someone experiencing a great need? What action might also be required?

Our Generous God

Heavy rainfall throughout the year plays a vital role in the ecosystem of the Amazon Rainforest. The average amount varies depending on the location within that jungle, but 100 inches is not uncommon. Think about that: 100 inches is over 8 feet of water! The health of this ecosystem is thought to interact with other ecosystems throughout the world in various ways.

We live in a fallen world, with deprivation and lack resulting from sin—sometimes in general, sometimes specifically (examples: Joshua 7:10-12; Haggai 1:1-11). But even in times of deprivation, God *wants* to be generous. What might you be doing to stand in the way of God's generosity?

—O. P.

B. Willing and Able (vv. 17-20)

17. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

This verse is worded very similarly to the "missing" part of Psalm 145:13, discussed above.

The phrase *all his ways*, which parallels *all his works*, includes the generosity of the previous verse. The word translated *holy* occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament, but almost always, it refers to godly people. It refers to a characteristic of God in no more than a half dozen places, and this is one of them. Throughout history, those who have questioned God's righteousness or justice have discovered that this is an area where humanity lacks, not God (examples: Job 38-41; Ezekiel 18:25-29; Habakkuk 1-2).

What Do You Think?

What psalms can give you voice if God doesn't seem to be acting at all?

Digging Deeper

What gives you confidence in God's holiness and righteousness in the face of the evils in the world?

18. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.

Psalms of lament often express regret that God seems so far away, and they request God's tangible presence (examples: Psalms 22:11, 19; 35:22; 38:21; 71:12). On the other hand, there are biblical cases where people do *not* desire God's nearness (compare Jonah 1:3; Revelation 6:15-17; etc.). But here, it would be helpful to see a distinction between the two senses of the near/far issue. We might call one sense "literal nearness" and the other "spiritual nearness." The fact of God's presence and activity within the world is summed up in the word *immanence*; we are in the presence of



Visual for Lessons 9 & 10. Ask learners to pair up to discuss how today's lesson reveals what God's will is in the world.

the immanent God at all times—and note that this is not the word *imminent* (Jeremiah 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28). That's the literal nearness.

But in another sense of near/far, the fact of God's holiness results in His ethical distance from sinners; the more that people engage in unholliness, the more they are spiritually separated from the holy God. Jesus experienced this kind of separation as He took humanity's penalty for sin upon himself while dying on the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 [both quoting Psalm 22:1]). In so doing, Jesus solved the distance problem between God and humanity (compare Isaiah 55:6-7).

What Do You Think?

How do circumstances affect your sense of God's presence?

Digging Deeper

Does God's literal nearness comfort you even when He feels far away? Why or why not?

19. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him. He also will hear their cry, and will save them.

The second part of this verse clarifies the first part since God does not fulfill each and every imaginable *desire* that people have. The most striking example of God's hearing a *cry* and effecting deliverance is the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 3:7-10; 14:30).

The promise *will save them* can be understood in two senses in the various places it is used: it can mean rescue from a physical threat or from a spiritual threat of unholliness. Sometimes, the two senses are both present if rescue from a physical threat accompanies rescue from a spiritual threat (compare Ezekiel 37:23; Hosea 1:7).

We know from modern experience and Bible history that God does not always deliver godly people from the loss of their physical life; sometimes, His larger plans include such deaths—and those deaths are temporary, given the promise of our resurrection (Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15). But He is always ready, willing, and able to deliver us from spiritual threats (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Many psalms of lament (also called prayers for help) explore the apparent gap between human need and divine response. This psalm, however, does not explore that set of issues. It remains at the level of generalized praise. Whatever we may face in this life, God's final word will be one of salvation and healing.

20a. The LORD preserveth all them that love him.

Psalms 31:23; 91:14; and 97:10 also reflect the reality of this praise thought. *Preserveth* carries the idea of “protection.” The wording in the original Hebrew of the phrase *them that love him* is also translated “his friends” in Esther 5:10, 14; 6:13. Those who love God rejoice (Psalm 5:11) because of repeated acts of goodness toward them (119:132).

20b. But all the wicked will he destroy.

Psalm 94:23 is similar. In contrast to the experience of those who love God, *the wicked* can expect a terrible fate. This statement confesses a general truth, though the psalms also know a great deal about forgiveness of sins. The wicked are those who refuse to repent while deliberately pursuing the harm of others (compare Psalm 10:2-11).

III. Praiseworthy God, Part 2

(Psalm 145:21)

21. My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.

The psalm concludes, as many do, with a promise to praise God. This personal commitment by the one praying this psalm also extends to others (*all flesh*). The psalmist hopes that all beings capable of praise, especially humans but not necessarily limited to them, will acknowledge the rightness of God's good reputation for saving works and do so in perpetuity (*for ever and ever*). This phrasing serves as an appropriate "bookend" to the psalm, with the first of the two bookends occurring in the opening verse of our lesson today.

What Do You Think?

How do you address any disparity in your life between speaking God's praise and living out that praise?

Digging Deeper

What stories serve as examples to guide both your words and deeds of praise?

Conclusion

A. Psalm 145 in the Psalter

On a first reading, Psalm 145 may seem to lack the emotional intensity and attention to life's struggles that appear in many other psalms. It may appear to be a collection of general truths or even platitudes about the life of faith. Such platitudes do not stand up to the challenge of life, and so the psalm may appear less substantial than others.

It is better, however, not to read this psalm alone but to recall its function in the overall book. The book of Psalms contains both prayers for help and prayers of thanksgiving. Early in the book, laments or prayers for help overwhelmingly predominate, but as the book goes along, the balance changes in favor of hymns of praise. The concluding five psalms are loud, exuberant songs praising God. Psalm 145 is closely connected to them. In other words, if we consider the book as a whole, we see it move from times of distress, during which we call out to God for help, to times of rejoicing over God's saving works. That same shift appears in many individual psalms that begin with lament and end with a promise to praise. In other words, the organization of the book tries to move its readers along the spiritual road to greater confidence in

God's mercy. Psalm 145 marks the conclusion of that movement. When understood this way, Psalm 145 is much more than a bundle of clichés.

B. Psalm 145 in Life

Psalm 145 celebrates the permanent nature of God's kingdom and His work in the lives of people. It reminds anyone singing it that God aims at the highest and best possible things, including the best possible outcomes for our lives. God desires that we be saved and rescued from all the manifestations of sin and death in this world and the next. God has communicated that desire through the prophets and apostles, and most fully through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Awareness of that communication leads to a life filled with wonder and practical attention to spiritual and moral growth.

It is not easy to adopt a superior purpose when we are trying to live our best life now. The superior purpose calls upon us to reexamine ourselves and reform aspects of our lives. We refine our values, redirect our affections, and reshape our behaviors in the direction of God. Even our language becomes infused with grace and mercy, as God's is. To give up on the possibility of growth is to lose hope itself.

The wonder of God's love for us compels us to rise above the passions of the moment toward the splendor that awaits us in God's presence. This psalm points us to that splendor as it celebrates the compassion and beauty of God as it challenges us to pursue noble causes rather than short-term goals of pleasure or power.

C. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise You even though our best praise falls short. Help us to become people of the truth, who state our amazement at Your goodness and kindness to us. Accept our words of praise and gratitude because they are the only things we can give You that matter. In Jesus' name. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Make your acts of praise and worship
contagious!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Distribute blank index cards. Have each participant write on a card something in this world that lasts a long time. Then, have participants share their cards with one another and rank-order them in chronological length. Then ask, “How long do you think the longest thing in the arrangement of cards will last, and why?” Discuss.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Yesterday, Today, and Forever” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute to complete as indicated. Ask, “How many of your ‘always’ statements are really true? What would life look like if they were all true?” Give opportunities for participants to discuss.

Make a transition as you say, “Things of earth do not stay the same forever. But in today’s lesson, pay attention to that which is praised for being eternal and constant.”

Into the Word

Have Psalm 145:1, 10-12 read aloud in the following way. Divide the class into three parts: one individual (designated **Personal**), a group of three (designated **Corporate**), and the rest of the class (designated **Universal**). Arrange participants so that the **Corporate** is surrounding and facing the **Personal**, and the **Universal** is surrounding and facing the **Corporate**.

Have **Personal** read verse 1 aloud alone, emphasizing the words *I* and *my*. Have **Corporate** join **Personal** to read verse 10 together, emphasizing *all* and *saints*. Then, have **Corporate** turn around to face **Universal** and read verse 11. Finally, have **Universal** join in with **Personal** and **Corporate** to read verse 12 together.

Follow this reading by inviting participants to discuss the distinctive benefits of personal, corporate, and universal worship of God. What are the advantages and limitations of each? This can be a small-group exercise.

Option. Use a role-play debate among the three reading groups to argue that its own format is the “best” among the three.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 145:13-17. Instruct participants to listen for all instances of the words *all*, *every*, and *everlasting*. Write the phrases on the board as they are spoken. Invite participants to identify what strikes them as especially powerful, and why. (*Recommended:* create your own “cheat sheet” ahead of time with correct responses to ensure that none are missed.)

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 145:18-21. Divide participants into four groups and assign these verses, one per group: Matthew 11:28; Luke 9:23; John 3:18; and Revelation 3:20. Instruct them to discuss how their assigned verse relates to Psalm 145:18-21. Write this question on the board: “How would you describe the relationship that God calls people toward?” Allow time for ensuing whole-class discussion.

Option. Distribute the envelopes you have prepared before class per the instructions on the “He Does, We Do” facilitator exercise (it’s on the activity page that you can download). Instruct participants to match the first and second parts of the verses as quickly as possible. *This is a closed-Bible speed drill!*

Into Life

Use the Lesson Context to explain the nature of Psalm 145 as an acrostic poem, with every verse or line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Say, “We’re going to try doing the same with the English alphabet.”

Assign each learner one or more letters of the alphabet. Distribute index cards on which participants are to write one word or short phrase that begins with their assigned letter(s) to describe an attribute of the Lord. Participants are not to write their names on the cards as you collect them. Read cards aloud.

Praying Properly

Devotional Reading: Psalm 4
Background Scripture: Matthew 6:5-15

Matthew 6:5-15

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.



Key Text

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. —Matthew 6:10

Introduction

A. Hallowed, Not Hallows

The seventh and final book in the Harry Potter series is *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. These “hallows” are three magical objects central to the final plot of the story. When I first saw the title of this last book, the word *hallows* lit up one thing in my mind (as it did for many people): the unusual phrase from the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be thy name.” To be sure, the hallows of Harry Potter and the “hallowed” of the Lord’s Prayer are unrelated. But what do we mean when we say, “Hallowed be thy name”? That is one topic of today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

One of the things we know about Jesus is that He was a man of prayer. He would rise early in the morning so He could spend time alone in prayer (example: Mark 1:35). On at least one occasion, He spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12). When Jesus knew His death was close at hand, He spent a significant portion of His final evening praying in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-43).

What we call “the Lord’s Prayer” is found in Matthew 6:9-13, with a shorter version in Luke 11:2-4. That title can be misleading because there’s no record that Jesus himself prayed this prayer. Instead, these were guidelines given by Jesus to others about how they should pray.

Matthew’s version is recorded as being part of the famed Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:29). The version in Luke arises from a request by one of the disciples in Luke 11:1. We can safely assume that Jesus’ disciples were already men of prayer, but they wanted to pray more effectively.

The disciples’ interest in learning about prayer was sparked by their awareness that John the Baptist had taught his own followers the correct way to pray (Luke 11:1). While we don’t have any of John the Baptist’s prayers, we do have examples of Jesus’ prayers (example: John 17:1-26, which consists of a lengthy prayer given by Jesus in the upper room during the Last Supper).

The church tends to use the Lord’s Prayer from Matthew more often because it is more detailed

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 3: Life in God’s Kingdom

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List Jesus’ key teachings about prayer in Matthew 6:5-15.
2. Explain the purpose(s) of the prayer’s four couplets.
3. Resolve to devote more prayer time to one area identified in Matthew 6:5-15 that may currently be lacking.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Hallowed, Not Hallows
- B. Lesson Context

I. Directives for Prayer (Matthew 6:5-8)

- A. For Public Praise (v. 5)
- B. In Personal Privacy (v. 6)
- C. Without Prattle (v. 7)
- D. With Purpose (v. 8)

II. The Prototypical Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

- A. Proper Address (v. 9)
- B. Proper Alignment (v. 10)
- C. Proper Asking (vv. 11-13)

Daily Bread

The Right Source

III. Addendum on Forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15)

Conclusion

- A. Sincere Petitions or Mere Repetitions?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

than the wording in Luke's Gospel. It has long been considered one of the church's treasures, perhaps the most famous prayer in history. In some traditions, it is referred to as "the Our Father," reflecting its opening phrase. A similar version of this calls the prayer the *Paternoster*, Latin for "Our Father." An early manual on Christian practices called the *Didache* includes Matthew's version of the prayer with the instructions that it should be prayed three times a day (*Didache* 8).

Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer has a multi-part address to God, several petitions or requests, and a concluding acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. We notice the value of the prayer when we contrast it with the ways one should *not* pray. That's where today's study begins.

I. Directives for Prayer

(Matthew 6:5-8)

A. For Public Praise (v. 5)

5. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Before the time of Jesus, the word *hypocrite* was used to describe actors on the stage, people who pretended to be what they were not. That is Jesus' point: some people are respected for their devotion to God, but they are not devoted to God at all. Instead, they want other people's attention and approval.

Matthew records the use of the word *hypocrite(s)* 15 times, Mark once, and Luke four times—all 20 on the lips of Jesus. In Matthew 6, Jesus gives three contexts for such wrong-hearted behavior: giving for the relief of the poor (Matthew 6:2), praying in public (6:5, today's text), and fasting (6:16). Jesus did not condemn the practices of giving, public prayer, or fasting as such; instead, He was condemning self-seeking motives behind them.

Jesus' hearers would have recognized this type of person from their own experiences, particularly on trips to Jerusalem (compare Luke 18:9-

14). Some may have even recognized themselves in this description. Jesus pronounced that such phony people *have their reward*: the short-lived admiration of others, not the eternal recognition of God. This is the wrong way to pray.

B. In Personal Privacy (v. 6)

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Rather than make a public performance of prayer, Jesus stressed the need to retreat to a private place. Note again that the issue is not "private prayer" versus "public prayer" as such. Instead, it's an issue of "private prayer" versus "public performance." Jesus wasn't stressing *where* a person prayed, but *why*. A valid prayer is directed to God alone and is not concerned with whether others notice.

What Do You Think?

How can believers exercise humility in their spiritual actions while also expressing boldness to be a witness for Jesus when the opportunity arises?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does the example of Daniel in Daniel 6:10 inform your response?

C. Without Prattle (v. 7)

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Jesus' mention of the excesses of hypocritical, performative praying suggests its practice in His day. Prayers of this nature are no better than prayers of *the heathen*. In the cultures surrounding Israel in Jesus' time, the "gods" were often considered unpredictable and selfish, like powerful human rulers. Praying to such gods was a matter of begging them not to harm or nagging them for a gift. Further, many pagans thought of their gods less as personal beings and more like unseen forces that could be manipulated.



Visual for Lessons 9 & 10. *Have this visual on display as you conclude class by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

For pagans, prayer was a matter of saying certain words and phrases that were thought to have the power to make those forces bend to one's will. In either case, such prayer involved *vain repetitions*—of saying the same thing repeatedly. We consider Elijah's confrontation with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel. There, Elijah sarcastically encouraged them to pray more and louder because their god might be asleep (1 Kings 18:25-29).

D. With Purpose (v. 8)

8. Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Next, Jesus informed His hearers of an important "given" that should undergird all prayers: our heavenly *Father* knows our needs before we even pray to Him. We are not telling Him anything He doesn't already know. This does not mean we should not ask or that we should assume prayer is unnecessary. Prayer reflects the measure of the faith we have in the fact that God does indeed listen (James 1:6; 5:15).

II. The Prototypical Prayer

(Matthew 6:9-13)

A. Proper Address (v. 9)

9a. After this manner therefore pray ye.

A cup of coffee consists of two things: the cup

that holds the coffee (the "form") and the coffee itself (the "content"). Prayer also has a form and content. We have discussed the *form*; we now move to prayer's *content*.

9b. Our Father.

This establishes the prayer's recipient (see Lesson Context). Unless you know to whom you are praying, your prayers may be pointless at best and a violation of Exodus 20:3 at worst (compare Isaiah 45:20b). By definition, *prayer* is a conversation with the God of all creation. As Christians, we do not launch our prayers into the void, hoping that someone will be listening. Instead, we pray in faith, addressing the one true God who creates, rules, and redeems.

Jesus teaches us to address God in two ways. Beginning our prayer with *Our Father* is to acknowledge that very fact. During Jesus' time, Jewish people had various terms to describe God, but this specific description was rarely used. God as Father appears less than a dozen times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 9:6; 63:16 [twice]; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 19; Malachi 2:10). By contrast, the Gospel of Matthew alone uses the terms "heavenly Father" and "Father in heaven" more than 40 times.

9c. Which art in heaven.

Continuing from above, we come to the second part of properly addressing God. We might ask, Where is *heaven*? Heaven is where God is, and we are barely able to scratch the surface in understanding that (compare and contrast 2 Corinthians 12:2). Yet there is an important truth for us in Jesus' words: God is the "God of heaven," a phrase used about two dozen times in the Bible, all but two of which occur in the Old Testament (examples: Ezra 1:2; 5:11-12; compare Revelation 11:13; 16:11). He is not part of the physical, created universe. God is separate. We are on earth; God is in Heaven (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Even so, we mortals are privileged to speak with the God of Heaven (Hebrews 4:16).

9d. Hallowed be thy name.

Following the issue of how to address God, Jesus instructs on the proper way of thinking about God. The word *hallowed* speaks to the issue of God's holiness. When we pray *hallowed be thy*

name, we are saying, in effect, “May your name be holy.” This is a commitment to honor the third commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20:7). But it’s more than just being correct at *not* doing something; there’s a positive element as well. When we pray “hallowed by thy name,” we reaffirm our resolve to uphold His holy nature.

What Do You Think?

What can our congregation do to help people better understand the concept of the holiness of God?

Digging Deeper

How might this understanding help us recognize our need for holiness?

B. Proper Alignment (v. 10)

10a. Thy kingdom come.

This petition may be challenging to understand because the underlying Greek verb is a third-person imperative, and the English language doesn’t have this grammatical option, strictly speaking. The closest we can come is by using the word *let*. We see this in our translations of third-person imperatives in John 7:37 and Revelation 22:17. But the idea is more forceful than taking the word *let* to mean “allow.”

Think of the song “Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!” The desire expressed by the title isn’t one of merely “allowing” snow to fall (as if one could stop it!). Instead, the sense is an urgent need that must be met. And that’s the sense of the verse at hand—expressing an urgent need for God’s *kingdom* to *come* in its fullness. In this kingdom, there will be no temptation, sin, pain, sadness, or death. God will rule over everything, and His followers will worship Him forever (see Revelation 11:15).

10b. Thy will be done.

This partial verse contains another third-person imperative in the underlying Greek. As mentioned above, the idea is an implied use of the word *let* in a stronger sense than merely “allow.” For examples of the word *let* equating to the word *allow*, see Acts 5:38; 17:9; for more examples of the word

let in the stronger sense, see Matthew 11:15; Galatians 1:8.

10c. In earth, as it is in heaven.

These twin petitions are all-encompassing. To pray for the establishment of God’s kingdom *is* to pray for the carrying out of God’s will in every place as God reigns over His realms. Or perhaps we should use the singular word *realm* instead. The two locations of *earth* and *heaven* should not be unduly separated since the qualifier unites them *as it is in*. In using that phrase, Jesus depicts Heaven as a place without opposition to God’s will.

When we pray these petitions, we pray that God’s kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, will come to earth. To pray this is to pray that God’s sovereign will, as realized in Heaven, will prevail in the present world where we live. We are praying that all opposition to God will cease. And most of all, we are praying this for ourselves. We are saying, “Lord, I want Your kingdom to be fully present in my life. I want my life to be a perfect reflection of Your will” (compare Jesus’ prayer in Matthew 26:39).

What Do You Think?

Through what tangible ways can you help speed the inbreaking of God’s kingdom?

Digging Deeper

How do 2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 11:17; and 22:20 help frame your decision?

C. Proper Asking (vv. 11-13)

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

There are two important points to note about this request. First, the word *give* has a broad sense of “provide” when associated with God. Second, the idea of *bread* in the Bible is more than a reference to baked loaves. The word may indeed refer to that, but context determines if the concept of “food in general” is meant (examples: Matthew 14:17-19; 15:26). The word may have the even larger sense of “things necessary for life” (John 6:33). When we say this prayer, we acknowledge that we rely on God. It is not about informing

Him of things we think He might not be aware of (Matthew 6:31-32). We are affirming our belief that God will meet every need.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to practice gratitude to God for the “daily bread” that He has provided?

Digging Deeper

How can you turn that practice into a daily habit of gratitude?

Daily Bread

Sadly, my business failed in the summer of 2004, and we lost all our material assets. Our house, cars, and every other possession were sold to the highest bidder to settle our financial obligations. We retained only our children, dog, clothes, and an old car of no monetary worth.

We found a small apartment, and my wife got a job as a cashier at a grocery store, working the night shift. One benefit to the job was discounts on food. Because she worked nights, she had the first shot at day-old bread and other perishables that were about to expire. This challenging time made us appreciate our “daily bread.” It also made me see the Old Testament stories in a new light, for example, the one where God gives the Israelites manna every day and the one where He helps the prophet Elijah and a widow by giving them flour and oil daily.

Today we have enough food on hand for a few weeks. Whether we are unsure about where our next meal is coming from, or we have plenty, the words of Jesus still hit home for us: “Give us this day our daily bread.” In light of what we’ve been through, these simple words keep reminding us that God knows what we need daily and that He can provide for us. What personal experiences have you had that make the words of this prayer resonate deeply with you? —J. M.

12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

This petition is unique in being conditional. As we ask for God’s forgiveness, we promise to be for-

giving of others. This is the only petition in the prayer that receives an additional comment from Jesus at the end (Matthew 6:14-15, see below). For an extended discussion on this expectation, see Matthew 18:21-35.

13a. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

These final petitions of the prayer are two sides of the same coin: to *lead us not into* is to *deliver us from*. The first part of this request has troubled those who think it raises the possibility that God himself can be responsible for tempting us to sin. Jesus did not intend this understanding, and James 1:13 is definitive on this point: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” God may allow temptation (Job 1:12; 2:6), but He does not initiate or cause it. Still, there are moments when God saves us from difficult situations or “trials” (see 1 Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 2:9). Taking the two petitions of this half-verse together gives the sense of “give us power over”—and He does (1 Corinthians 10:13).

What Do You Think?

How can believers prepare themselves for the inevitable temptations that arise?

Digging Deeper

Who will you ask to be your accountability partner for when you face temptations?

The Right Source

In September 2013, things got chaotic at the airport in Fairbanks, Alaska. A car was cruising down the taxiway and across the runway to get to the terminal. Surprisingly, another driver did the same thing. The cause was a bug in a navigation app that mistakenly guided people through a gate meant only for aircraft! Thankfully, there were no accidents, and the app was eventually fixed.

Even though signs clearly stated it was a restricted area, the drivers did not notice these warnings and unthinkingly followed what the app told them. Even when it seemed pretty clear that something was wrong and that they should not

be driving on an airport taxiway, they continued crossing the runway because they trusted the app more than their own judgment.

This story highlights how easily we can take a wrong path when we heed directions from a defective source. That was the problem of being led into temptation in Genesis 3. When you face a sinful temptation, be sure of one thing: it's not from God. But as the drivers on the runway reveal, we may be so used to following a seemingly authoritative source that we do not question how or where we are being led. How can you be sure that it is God who is genuinely guiding you and that you are not just going the wrong way because you ignore the signs that you are listening to a defective source? —J. M.

13b. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

This half-verse is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel. But with echoes of 1 Chronicles 29:11-13, it nevertheless expresses a biblical idea. It is very fitting for the themes of this prayer as it doubles down in emphasizing God's sovereignty, with which the prayer begins.

III. Addendum on Forgiveness

(Matthew 6:14-15)

14-15. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

After describing how to pray, Jesus gives more information on the need to *forgive*. This conditional petition is so important that Jesus later clarified it with a lengthy parable in Matthew 18:21-35.

In the addendum on forgiveness before us, we note that Jesus has switched from the words *debts* and *debtors* in Matthew 6:12 to the word *trespasses*. The word translated "trespasses" often refers to sins (example: Ephesians 1:7), while the word translated "debts" might include other kinds of obligations (examples: Matthew 18:24-25; Romans 1:14).

Conclusion

A. Sincere Petitions or Mere Repetitions?

A couple started dating. In due course, they began to take turns attending each other's church. Her church recited the Lord's Prayer every Sunday as part of the worship service; his church never did. When she asked him why his church never did so, he responded that his church didn't want the Lord's Prayer to become a repetitious chant.

He had a point. Mere repetition of the Lord's Prayer without regard to its message and challenge is of negative value. To do so runs the risk of being condemned as those who honor God with their lips but whose hearts are far from Him (Matthew 15:8 quoting Isaiah 29:13).

But that danger is true of anything we do regularly when the church meets. Some churches have communion services only once per quarter because it might become "too common" if observed every Sunday. (Few churches, however, would apply the same reasoning to the collection of offerings!)

Perhaps a good middle ground would be different prayers every Sunday that nevertheless reflected the categories in the Lord's Prayer. Would that work in your church? Why, or why not?

B. Prayer

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Pray as if God is listening—because He is.

How to Say It

Didache	Did-uh-key, or Did-uh-kay.
Gethsemane	Geth- <i>sem</i> -uh-nee (G as in <i>get</i>).
Paternoster	Pah-tur-naw-stir.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share experiences from childhood of having to memorize certain prayers. Encourage them to think about how those prayers shaped their understanding of prayer. (*Option:* teachers of larger classes may wish to have the experiences discussed in small groups to conserve time.)

Say, “For some people, prayer may be such a common habit that they give it very little thought; for others, prayer may not be as familiar and, therefore, more difficult to remember to practice. In today’s lesson, consider what new prayer habit you could learn from Jesus’ instruction.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Matthew 6:5-8. Form learners into triads or study pairs.

Distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed this question: *How can we pray unseen by others per Matthew 6:6 when we’re supposed to let our lights shine before others so that they may see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father per Matthew 5:16?*

After a few minutes, reconvene for whole-class discussion. Then, ask a volunteer to read Matthew 6:9-13. Return participants to their triads or study pairs.

Distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed this question: *Considering Jesus’ directive, “After this manner therefore pray ye,” does that mean we should at least occasionally use the exact words of this prayer? Why, or why not?*

After a few minutes, reconvene for whole-class discussion. Then, ask a volunteer to read Matthew 6:14-15. Return participants to their triads or study pairs.

Distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed this question: *Considering God’s track record and Luke 17:4, should forgiveness be extended to someone who does not repent? Why, or why not?*

Pose the following case study to the class:

A certain man decided to keep track of the prayer requests voiced by members of his adult Bible study class. For 10 weeks, he made a record of them. (He did not offer any of his own in order not to bias the result.) When the 10 weeks were up, he had recorded 133 prayer requests. He quickly noted that they fell into three general categories: 97 were for physical healings; 33 were for unfavorable situations such as job loss or marriage and family problems; and 3 were for spiritual needs. What’s wrong with this picture?

Alternative or option. For a different or additional case study, distribute copies of the “Ceremonial Theism?” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Discuss in triads or study pairs before whole-class discussion.

Option. As a transition between Into the Word and Into Life segments, distribute copies of the “ACTS in Action” exercise from the activity page. Allow one minute for each participant to complete the four segments marked with a [•]. *Note:* this should be individual work, not for small groups or study pairs, because it calls for personal responses. Assure your learners at the outset of the activity that you will not collect the responses or ask anyone to share them publicly. By contrast, the second part of the “ACTS in Action” exercise should be completed in triads or study pairs. (Note the need for highlighters or colored pencils.)

Into Life

Write this question on the board for whole-class discussion: *Is it proper to call the various aspects of prayer in general and the Lord’s Prayer in particular “ingredients of a recipe”? Why, or why not?*

After discussion, allow a time of prayerful confession regarding your learners’ needs to improve the quantity, quality, and motives that undergird their prayer lives. But don’t put anyone on the spot to do so. Close with the Lord’s Prayer.

Heeding Wholly

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:31-42
Background Scripture: Matthew 11

Matthew 11:7-15, 20-24

7 And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

11 Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.

13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:

21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

22 But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

24 But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Key Text

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. —Matthew 11:20

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 3: Life in God's Kingdom

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Jesus' description of John the Baptist.
2. Explain why the generation that Jesus criticized displayed a lack of wisdom in its evaluation of both Him and John the Baptist.
3. Recruit an accountability partner to ensure that hearing results in heeding.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Celebrity Preachers
- B. Lesson Context

I. John, the Messenger (Matthew 11:7-15)

- A. Unlikely Celebrity (vv. 7-10)
Preparing a Way
- B. Last of His Kind (vv. 11-15)

II. Jesus, the Wonder Worker (Matthew 11:20-24)

- A. Failure to Repent (vv. 20-22)
- B. Judgment to Ensnare (vv. 23-24)
A Stubborn Dog

Conclusion

- A. Pivotal People in Unrepentant Cultures
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Celebrity Preachers

If there ever was a “celebrity preacher,” George Whitefield (1714–1770) was him. An English preacher who toured America in the eighteenth century, Whitefield’s strong voice allowed him to address crowds of thousands with his emotionally charged and highly effective sermons. Whitefield contributed to the religious revival known as the Great Awakening, which was a significant influence on the history of the United States.

Today, celebrity preachers have tools of which Whitefield would never have dreamed; television, smartphones, and the Internet allow the preachers’ messages to be seen and heard throughout the world. Such preachers are known to construct enormous buildings that can seat thousands at a time. Televangelists receive contributions to support their ministries and (sometimes) lavish lifestyles.

Both Jesus and John the Baptist were celebrity preachers in their day. But they were very different from the high-profile televangelists we see today! Today’s lesson will explore why.

B. Lesson Context

The significance of John *the Baptist* is hinted at in the fact that his name is mentioned about 90 times across the four Gospels and the book of Acts. It’s important to clarify that he is not the same as John *the Apostle*, who’s mentioned about half as often in the New Testament. The New Testament mentions another man by the name of John (also known as “Mark”) in Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37. “John” was a popular name!

John the Baptist was born in Judaea (Luke 1:65). His father, Zacharias, was of a priestly family (thus of the tribe of Levi). His mother was Elisabeth, a relative of Mary (1:35-36), so John and Jesus were related through their mothers. John spent a great deal of time in the wilderness while young (1:80).

John preached repentance “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). His baptizing of the multitudes resulted in his identifying title. In the Gospels, he is called “John the Baptist” by both his supporters and adversaries (Matthew 3:1; 14:2; etc.).

John contributed to the ministry of Jesus in three important ways. First, he was in one sense “Elias [same as Elijah], which was for to come” (Matthew 11:14; compare Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 17:10-13; contrast John 1:21). In this regard, John was understood to assume the role of Elijah as a prophetic voice that prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah (Luke 1:17; John 1:23).

Second, John’s baptizing of Jesus in the Jordan River was “to fulfil all righteousness”—it was the right thing to do in God’s plan, confirmed by “the Spirit of God” and “a voice from heaven” (Matthew 3:13-17). Third was John’s prophetic identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Today’s lesson examines a time after John’s ministry as a wilderness preacher had ended. He had run afoul of the local ruler, Herod Antipas, and ended up in prison. This turn of events resulted in doubts for John, which he attempted to resolve by sending two of his disciples to Jesus to determine whether or not Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 11:1-3). Jesus responded by pointing to the evidence of the miracles (11:4-6). Today’s lesson text picks up after Jesus’ response to John’s disciples (Luke 7:24-28 is a partial parallel).

I. John, the Messenger

(Matthew 11:7-15)

A. Unlikely Celebrity (vv. 7-10)

7. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

Having just received Jesus’ answer to their query (see Lesson Context), John’s disciples *departed* to relay that response to John the Baptist, who was in prison (Matthew 11:2). As they left, Jesus turned the tables to inquire about John’s identity. Why did so many people leave their comfortable homes to make an uncomfortable, inconvenient trip *out into the wilderness* to be baptized by John (Mark 1:5; Luke 3:3-7)? Did they make such a trip because they wanted to see *a reed shaken with the wind*—a description of a wishy-washy, indecisive person whose message shifts with the winds

of popularity? These questions were designed to make Jesus’ audience consider the kind of individual John the Baptist was.

8. But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses.

Jesus continued to probe His audience’s motivation for making inconvenient trips to see John in the wilderness. Did they travel to a wilderness area to see a fashion show featuring *a man clothed in soft raiment*? This question paints a word picture of someone who lived in stark contrast to John the Baptist. John led a minimalistic life in the wilderness, far removed from the lavish comforts of a king’s palace (see Matthew 3:4).

What Do You Think?

What distinctive actions will you take to demonstrate faithfulness to God, even if they conflict with cultural expectations?

Digging Deeper

How are God’s people called to be different from the world? What Scripture references support your answer?

9. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet.

Jesus posed another rhetorical question. And then He voiced the answer that was on everyone’s mind. John’s message was of such a nature, his preaching so powerful that even hostile religious leaders and Roman soldiers came to investigate if not outright repent (Luke 3:14; John 1:19-27). They came because they thought John was at least *a prophet* and possibly even the Messiah (Luke 3:15; John 1:19-20; Acts 13:25).

Jesus confirms that the multitudes were correct in their belief that John was a prophet. This designation carries specific implications. First, a prophet speaks for God. The prophets of Israel often began their messages with “Hear the word of the Lord” (Isaiah 39:5; Jeremiah 7:2; Hosea 4:1; etc.). The people believed John was speaking the word of God to them. Second, prophets were perceived as an integral part of Israel’s history. By the time Jesus was born, Israel had about 2,000 years of history, tracing back to the time of Abraham!

While agreeing with the people's assessment that John was a prophet, Jesus upped the ante by designating John as *more than a prophet*. What that entailed comes next.

10. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

As the Messiah's immediate forerunner, John was not only a prophetic voice of the Lord. He was also a fulfillment of a prophecy himself. This prophecy is found in Isaiah 40:3-5 and Malachi 3:1. It is so significant that all four Gospels mention this role (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:1-3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23).

What Do You Think?

In what ways do believers prepare the world for Christ's second return?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to prepare your life for Christ's return?

Preparing a Way

During World War II, the United States was worried about the defense of Alaska. As a result, the Army Corps of Engineers was tasked to build a highway that could be used to transport troops and equipment rapidly to Alaska as needed. The idea for the resulting 1,543-mile Alcan Highway had been around since the 1930s, but the war made it a priority.

More than 11,000 soldiers worked on the project. They worked long shifts, sometimes in subzero temperatures, and finished the project in less than nine months. This remarkable feat of engineering enabled the United States to safeguard its territory by establishing a way through the wilderness.

God, in His wisdom, foresaw the need to prepare the world for the arrival of Jesus. John the Baptist was the point man in that regard. He preached about the need for repentance and the inbreaking kingdom of God.

Jesus built a highway between earth and Heaven through His death on the cross and resurrection. How would you describe your experience walking along life's highway with Jesus? —J. M.

B. Last of His Kind (vv. 11-15)

11. Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In this verse, Jesus seemed to speak in a paradox. On the one hand, no person *born of women* up to that point was *greater than John the Baptist*. On the other hand, *he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*. How can these both be true?

The key is understanding that in various contexts, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God (Matthew prefers the designation "kingdom of heaven") in terms of three time frames: near, present, and yet to come. Jesus spoke of God's reign as being "nigh at hand" (Luke 21:30-31). But as Jesus healed and drove out demons, He also spoke of God's kingdom as being present (Matthew 12:26-28). And when He spoke of His own return, Jesus pictured the kingdom as a future reality (7:21-23; 25:34). The ultimate nature of that future kingdom will be so marvelous that the person who is least in it is to be thought of as greater than John the Baptist—whom no one (other than Jesus himself) surpassed in terms of the kingdom of heaven being near.

John's importance lies in the fact that he is a transitional figure in the history of salvation. He didn't carry out his ministry as an early member of the new covenant being ushered in by Jesus. The next verse strengthens this idea.

12-13. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

Combining the time elements recorded in Matthew 4:12, 17 with those in Luke 3:1-3, 23, we realize that the interval between *the days of John the Baptist* and *now* (as Jesus was speaking) was relatively short—only a few months. This points to an overlap of the ministries of John and Jesus, confirmed by John 3:22-36. Thus, there is no clear line of demarcation between John's role as the last of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus' inauguration of the *kingdom of heaven*. John's job was to proclaim *the prophets and the law* (the old system) to ready the people for encountering the Messiah. Jesus, as that

Messiah, came to open the doors to the kingdom via His death and resurrection (the new system; compare Luke 16:16; Hebrews 9:20; 10:19-20).

Jesus' mention of *violence* foreshadows John's pending death by beheading (Matthew 14:6-12). It may also apply to Jesus' own death by brutal crucifixion (16:21; etc.). The church's beginning was not calm and readily accepted. Both the Romans and the Jewish people who did not believe in the gospel used violence to stop the advance of the gospel, as seen in the death of James the Apostle (Acts 12:1-2). Although Isaiah saw the Messiah as the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6) and Hebrews proclaims Jesus as the "King of peace" (Hebrews 7:2), the history of the church is littered with violence and persecution.

More difficult to understand is Jesus saying that *the violent take it by force*. Some have seen this as a call for Christians to be more activist, even violent, when met with opposition. These interpreters say we must fight fire with fire as we both live and die by the sword, citing Jesus' words in Matthew 10:34. But surely Jesus' words in our lesson text are an acknowledgment of violence against His kingdom, not a call to violence in promoting or defending it. Jesus later admonished Peter to put his sword away after he slashed a man (John 18:11). Jesus was the object of violence in His time on earth, not the leader of a violent revolt.

14-15. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus concluded His teaching on John the Baptist by noting the fulfillment of a prophecy from Malachi 4:5: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." *Elias* is another name for the prophet Elijah. Elijah's ministry is documented in 1 Kings 17:1-19:21; 21:17-28; and 2 Kings 1:1-2:11. First-century Jews expected the prophecy of Elijah's return to be fulfilled by the arrival of Elijah reincarnated. Jesus affirmed the expectation of Elijah's return but not that of reincarnation. Rather, someone with the attitude and spirit of the original Elijah would come. That person was John the Baptist (Matthew 17:10-13; compare John 1:21).

What Do You Think?

What can you do to ensure that you do not become "hard of hearing" in a spiritual sense?

Digging Deeper

What are some reasons a person might be spiritually "hard of hearing"?

II. Jesus, the Wonder Worker

(Matthew 11:20-24)

A. Failure to Repent (vv. 20-22)

20. Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.

Following criticisms of "this generation" in Matthew 11:16-19, Jesus rebuked the residents of specific villages. (Luke 10:12-15 offers a parallel condemnation, although the setting differs.) The locations at issue were in Galilee, where most of Jesus' *mighty works* had been displayed. Jesus' popularity did not result in people heeding His message to "repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17); this message was identical to that of John the Baptist (3:2).

The Greek word translated *repentance* means "to change one's thought process." When someone repents, they alter their thinking about sin and embrace new thoughts and actions. But Jesus' message and method were not what the Jews of His day expected. To see God's work in the healing of lepers, the casting out of demons, etc., should have prompted repentance.

How to Say It

Bethsaida	Beth-say-uh-duh.
Canaanite	Kay-nun-ite.
Chorazin	Ko-ray-zin.
Galilean	Gal-uh-lee-un.
Herod Antipas	Hair-ud An-tih-pus.
Levi	Lee-vye.
Nineveh	Nin-uh-vuh.
Phoenician	Fuh-nish-un.
Sidon	Sigh-dun.
Tyre	Tire.



Visual for Lesson 11. *Point to this visual as you ask learners to silently consider how they might follow these imperatives in the upcoming week.*

21-22. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.

The villages of *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida* are located near the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, less than 10 miles from each other. *Chorazin*, a prosperous agricultural town in the hills above the Sea, is mentioned in the Bible only here and in Luke 10:13. *Bethsaida*, whose name means “house of fishing,” was on the east side of the Jordan River where it feeds into the Sea of Galilee in the north. It was the hometown of Philip, Peter, and Andrew (John 1:44).

Tyre and Sidon, on the other hand, were famous Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean coast north of Galilee. For these cities to *have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes* brings to mind the city of Nineveh, whose citizenry repented when hearing the message of the prophet Jonah (Jonah 3:5-6; Matthew 12:41). This also foreshadowed Jesus’ travel to the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, where he encountered the extraordinary faith of a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). Repentance and faith will be honored on *the day of judgment*, even among Gentile cities such as Tyre, Sidon, and Nineveh.

B. Judgment to Ensure (vv. 23-24)

23-24. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. For if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

The importance of *Capernaum* is reflected in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times by name in the four Gospels. This fishing village was on the Sea of Galilee, several miles southwest of Bethsaida. Capernaum was strategically located between villages along the Sea of Galilee and those in the Galilean highlands to the west—villages such as Nazareth. This may have been the reason that Jesus used Capernaum as a type of home base for His ministry (Matthew 4:13). Jesus performed several miracles (*mighty works*) in and around this location during His earthly ministry (8:5-13; Mark 1:21-34; 2:1-12; John 4:46-54).

The comparison of Capernaum to *Sodom* is quite stark! The latter was one of the cities God destroyed with “brimstone and fire . . . out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24) because of sin so “grievous” (18:20) that not even 10 righteous people were to be found there (18:32). In the later books of the Old Testament, Sodom becomes a byword for a place harshly judged for its unrepentant sinfulness (Isaiah 3:9; Zephaniah 2:9). Jerusalem did not escape this comparison (Jeremiah 23:14).

Jesus’ calls to repentance, like those of John the Baptist, were threatening and unappreciated in places like Capernaum and therefore rejected. Repentance precedes forgiveness (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22). But prideful hard-heartedness will result in a mighty fall, even to the eternal destiny of being *brought down to hell*.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to orient your life around repentance that leads to forgiveness?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure pride and hard-heartedness do not take root in your life?

A Stubborn Dog

Our furry friend Omar dashed out the open door at 5:00 a.m. before I could get his leash on him. As a Belgian Malinois, Omar can sprint faster than the speed limit in our area! Despite attempts with training collars and weeks of reward-based training, he bolts as soon as he realizes he is off the leash. He eventually returns after a few hours, but trying to chase him down is futile. Seeing us in pursuit makes him run faster and farther.

It's all a game for Omar. His doggy brain does not perceive any wrongdoing. Running is just a natural thing for him to do. Reminding myself of this helps temper my frustration when I welcome him back inside after his adventures. As much as Omar can vex me, God employs this dog to teach me invaluable lessons. I have been like Omar more times than I can count, reverting to old habits and disregarding the Spirit's call. Yet, every time I return in repentance, God is there, ready to welcome me back.

Jesus admonished the stubborn cities that refused to repent. Although they had seen the miracles firsthand, they resisted His call. Their lack of "ears to hear" and "eyes to see" is actually worse than our dog's attitude because it's self-inflicted (Matthew 13:15-16; Mark 8:18). Think about it: the city of Sodom would have repented if it had witnessed the same divine acts! Are there parts of your life where you persist in your stubbornness, refusing to surrender to God? —J. M.

Conclusion

A. Pivotal People in Unrepentant Cultures

Pivotal people are agents of change in moving others to new ways of thinking and doing. An example of a pivotal person in a nonreligious sense is Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon. We see several pivotal people in the Bible. Just one example from the Old Testament is Samuel, seen in his being the last of the judges and the first of the prophets (1 Samuel 3:20; 7:6, 15-17; Acts 3:24; 13:20). In the New Testament, we rightly see the ultimate pivotal person to be Jesus. His life, death, resurrection, and ascension marked and enabled the transition from the old covenant to the new cov-

enant (Romans 7:6; Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 8; etc.).

The image of Jesus in this regard is so powerful and profound that it's easy to overlook John the Baptist as a pivotal person also. As the last of the prophets who ministered under the realities of the old covenant (Matthew 11:9; 14:5; 21:26; Luke 1:76), he prepared the way for Jesus by preaching the nearness of the kingdom of heaven and the need to repent in anticipation of the new covenant.

Many in the first century AD did not accept John the Baptist's view of the kingdom of heaven and the need to repent. It is not widely accepted today. We live among unrepentant people who are often proud of transgressing God's standards. The power and prosperity of an unrepentant culture confront us relentlessly with a choice: Who will be the pivotal person(s) we allow to direct our thinking and doing: the pivotal people of social media or the Bible?

Making the wrong choice with regard to such influence runs the risk of infecting us with the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). That decision, in turn, might cause us to love the world at the expense of our love of the kingdom of heaven.

As we make the right choice daily, may we repeat neither the infamy of evil Sodom nor the unrepentance of Chorazin, Bethsaida, or Capernaum.

What Do You Think?

What concept or teaching in today's lesson do you have the most trouble coming to grips with? Why?

Digging Deeper

How will you resolve this problem?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, may Your Holy Spirit continue to bring us to repentance and acceptance of Your forgiveness even as we model this reality to others. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Choose repentance. Choose eternal life.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have the following written on the board before learners arrive:

When were you surprised by something . . .

- *that was contrary to what you expected?*
- *about which you had no expectations at all?*

Learners may need time to search their memories, so encourage person-to-person sharing before class formally begins.

When class does begin, challenge participants to compare and contrast the two types of expectations in a general sense with this question: “Without getting into specific stories or experiences, which ‘new reality’ do you find is harder to accept: (1) a reality that contradicts an existing expectation or (2) a reality about which you have no expectation whatsoever?” Disallowing the telling of specific personal stories, which can be lengthy, will keep this segment from dragging out.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today we’ll look at two individuals to see how they did not match the expectations of those they encountered. In the process, we may find our own expectations challenged as well.”

Into the Word

Have two participants read the two segments of the lesson text, one segment each. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following:

Identifying and Confronting Expectations

1. Summarize the people’s (apparent) expectations regarding John the Baptist in Matthew 11:7-15. Compare and contrast their expectations with those in Matthew 20:9-12; Luke 3:15; 9:7-9.
2. Summarize the people’s (apparent) expectations regarding Jesus in Matthew 11:20-24. Compare and contrast their expectations with those in Matthew 13:53-57; Luke 2:25-35; John 4:25; 7:25-31.

After small groups identify and discuss discoveries, reconvene for whole-class discussion.

Option. If time is short, have half the groups

discuss #1 on the handout while the other half discusses #2.

Option. If your learners need context regarding Jesus and John the Baptist, distribute copies of the “Different Roles, Common Goals” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete this in study pairs *before* the “Identifying and Confronting Expectations” exercise just discussed.

Into Life

Transition to application by asking participants to focus on the concept of “accountability” in the lesson text. After a time of open discussion, distribute handouts (you create) titled “Christian Accountability.” Have the following passages listed vertically down the left-hand side: Proverbs 27:17; Ezekiel 3:16-27; 3:8; John 12:6; 2 Corinthians 2:6; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 5:21; Hebrews 4:13; 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16.

Introduce the exercise by writing this passage on the board:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. —James 1:22

As you write, say, “Let’s explore some ways for us to be accountable to one another in the Christian life for making sure that *hearing* leads to *heeding*.”

Then, form small groups to consider the passages listed on the handout. Be prepared to refute the contention that we are accountable only to God. Beforehand, carefully read through the passages listed; you may wish to add to or subtract from the list, depending on the nature of your class. Explore the differences between accountability to the church and accountability to an individual.

Option. To set the towns of Matthew 11:20-24 within the broader context of the Bible, distribute copies of the “Ancient Cities, Sinful Histories” exercise from the activity page as a take-home, to be completed as indicated.

Living Lastly

Devotional Reading: 1 Samuel 2:1-10
Background Scripture: Matthew 19:16-30

Matthew 19:16-30

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother, and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee. What shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Key Text

Again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. —Matthew 19:24

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 3: Life in God's Kingdom

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the Old Testament commandments Jesus cited.
2. Explain what Jesus meant by the first being last and the last being first.
3. Identify any “do more to get right with God” habit in one’s life and seek the Spirit’s guidance in breaking free of it.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Checking All the Boxes
- B. Lesson Context

I. A Seeker’s Inquiry (Matthew 19:16-22)

- A. Sincere Question (v. 16)
- B. Initial Reply (vv. 17-19)
- C. Sincere Claim (v. 20)
- D. Further Challenge (v. 21)
- E. Sad Reaction (v. 22)

The Unexpected Test

II. The Savior’s Instruction (Matthew 19:23-30)

- A. Stunning Declaration (vv. 23-24)
- B. Surprised Reaction (vv. 25-27)
- C. Solemn Promise (vv. 28-30)

The Most-Coveted Airplane Seat

Conclusion

- A. Rethinking the Boxes
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Checking All the Boxes

The phrase “checking all the boxes” refers to meeting all the requirements to complete a given procedure. For example, a homebuyer must carefully complete all items on the “must-have” checklist before making an offer to purchase. That’s the concept in a positive sense (or one intended to be positive), as it serves as a tool to leave nothing to chance when something important must be done. We will see this intent in today’s lesson.

B. Lesson Context

The encounter recorded in today’s Scripture occurred only a few weeks before Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. The location was on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Matthew 19:1). This region was also referred to as *Perea* by Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian. Today’s Scripture text has parallels in Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30.

The first part of the lesson is our consideration of Jesus’ encounter with an unnamed man whom we refer to as “the rich, young ruler.” That designation results from combining descriptions in the three accounts of the synoptic Gospels: the man was *rich* (Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23), he was *young* (Matthew 19:22), and he was a *ruler* (Luke 18:18). Because he is described as being young, it has been suggested that he was probably not a member of the Jewish ruling body known as the Sanhedrin, but a “ruler” of a local synagogue. By the time we get to chapter 19 in the Gospel of Matthew, opinions about Jesus had become polarized (compare John 7:12). Luke 9:51–18:14 records the events that happened between the end of Matthew 18 and the beginning of Matthew 19.

This time frame featured several tense and pointed encounters with Pharisees and other individuals. These encounters continued into Matthew 19:1 and beyond as Jesus “departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan.” One such encounter is the subject of today’s text.

I. A Seeker's Inquiry

(Matthew 19:16-22)

A. Sincere Question (v. 16)

16. And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

Each of the three Gospel accounts of this encounter offers interesting details that the other two do not (see Lesson Context). Whereas Matthew's account begins simply by saying *one came*, Mark 10:17 adds that the man came by running and kneeling before Jesus. The account that begins in Luke 18:18 states at the outset that the man was "a certain ruler" (see Lesson Context).

There are variations in the ancient Greek wording of the first part of the man's question—variations not necessarily seen in an English translation. But there is no variation in two words: the man's inquiry about *eternal life*. This phrase is comparatively rare in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In Matthew, it appears in Greek only three times, and two of those three occur in today's study. The third occurrence is in Matthew 25:46, where "life eternal" is contrasted with "everlasting punishment" (similar is Matthew 18:8). All told, these three Gospels use this phrase a total of nine times.

Even so, the rare use of the phrase *eternal life* in the synoptic Gospels is balanced by the fact that all three include the dialogue with the rich young ruler. The man's question is a good one, and the answer is still vital today. The man appears to have been familiar with Jesus' teaching regarding eternal life (John 3:14-16; 5:24; 6:40; etc.). Certainly, he is to be commended for approaching Jesus as he did, possibly risking the criticism of the Sanhedrin.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone claiming to have eternal life only because of their acts of goodness?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture references come to mind that support your response?

B. Initial Reply (vv. 17-19)

17. And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

Rather than answer the man's question, Jesus first challenged him with a question. He wanted the man to consider whether he knew what he was asking. The man had used the word *good* twice in his question to Jesus, but did he grasp its significance? What did he mean by calling Jesus *good*? No one is truly good except *God*, Jesus told the man. Was he aware of the deity of the one he spoke to? Using "religious language" without depth of understanding can be very easy.

Not waiting for a reply, Jesus addressed the man's question about eternal life: he needed to *keep the commandments*. Jesus' response was similar to what He told "a certain lawyer" who had inquired about eternal life (Luke 10:25-28).

Jesus' response to the rich young ruler mirrored a typical reply from a first-century Jewish rabbi. Jesus intended to provoke self-reflection within the young man. It raises the question of why merely following the commandments was not fulfilling enough. If the young man was obeying these laws, why didn't it quench his thirst for eternal life?

18a. He saith unto him, Which?

Only Matthew records this response by the man. It seems to indicate his understanding that the various individual statutes within the Law of Moses can be rank-ordered from "necessary for salvation" downward. If this is the man's viewpoint, he is not alone (compare Matthew 22:35-36; Mark 12:28). This is understandable given that the Law of Moses consists of over 600 statutes!

18b-19. Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder,

How to Say It

Arimathaea	Air-uh-muh- <i>thee</i> -uh (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Perea	Peh-ree-uh.
Sanhedrin	San-huh-drun or San- <i>heed</i> -run.
synoptic	sih-nawp-tihk.

thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother, and, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

In response, Jesus quoted portions of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:2-17 (compare Deuteronomy 5:7-21). He also quoted Leviticus 19:18 (compare Matthew 22:39).

C. Sincere Claim (v. 20)

20. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?

The young man, who had asked what good thing he could do to receive eternal life, appeared to take heart from considering the commandments Jesus had listed. The man's claim to have *kept* these commandments from his *youth* sounds somewhat arrogant, though Jesus offered no reaction to the claim. The man does appear to have lived a morally upright life, perhaps similar to how Paul described himself as being "blameless" regarding a legalistic form of righteousness in his pre-Christian life (Philippians 3:6). *The young man* knew something was missing. It was likely with great anticipation that he asked, "*What lack I yet?*"

D. Further Challenge (v. 21)

21. Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come and follow me.

Jesus knows every person's heart (John 2:24-25; 6:61, 64; 13:11). Everyone has one or more weak areas that prevent being *perfect* (compare Matthew 5:48; Romans 3:10-12; Hebrews 7:19). And Jesus knew what that was in this man's case.

What Do You Think?

What attitudes prevent believers from being perfect, like our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48)?

Digging Deeper

What "go, sell, and give" type of steps might be necessary to help a believer avoid these attitudes?

E. Sad Reaction (v. 22)

22. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

The young man's reaction to Jesus' challenge reveals that he had broken the First Commandment. That's the one that says to have no other gods before the one true God. Think about it! By disobeying Jesus, was the man not honoring his *great possessions* above God? Luke's account includes this stark contrast: "And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich" (Luke 18:23). What Jesus told the man to do was not what he expected to hear.

We have no further information in Scripture about the rich young ruler. We do not know whether he ever changed his outlook and decided that he would do what Jesus commanded. Note that Jesus did not pursue the man or offer to negotiate with him. Jesus never changed and never will change the conditions to be His follower. However, this fact does not mean He is not saddened by any decision to reject those terms. This young man *went away sorrowful*, but we can be sure there was a greater sorrow in the heart of Jesus.

The Unexpected Test

When I entered the office of the Department of Motor Vehicles, a staff member asked if I was there to attempt a retest. It was my third day and third attempt at passing. Since I had been driving for 21 years, I believed I knew the rules. I held a driver's license from another state to prove it. But our move across state lines meant I had to pass my new state's driving exam to get a license.

My first two attempts at the test confronted me with a harsh truth: I did not know as much as I thought I did. I finally studied the traffic regulations and passed on the third attempt.

The rich young ruler who approached Jesus seemed sure he had passed the test. He seemed to know God's "traffic manual" (the Old Testament) pretty well, and he honored it. Also, to the man's credit, he attempted to "make sure" by asking what he still lacked. He certainly went to the right source for the answer! But the man found

the answer to be unacceptable. He failed the test he expected to pass.

The Bible is full of tests (examples: Genesis 2:17; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 8:8; 13:5-7), and we will experience those that are common to humanity. A big problem presents itself, however, in accepting what God's "passing score" is (contrast 2 Corinthians 10). How will you ensure that you will pass that test? —J. M.

II. The Savior's Instruction

(Matthew 19:23-30)

A. Stunning Declaration (vv. 23-24)

23. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Sometimes Jesus' public teaching or encounter with an individual was followed by instructions directed toward His *disciples* (examples: Matthew 13:10, 36; 19:10-12). Here Jesus provided further teaching concerning the threat that riches can pose to one's progress toward *the kingdom of heaven*.

24. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

To illustrate His point, Jesus used hyperbole—a statement exaggerated for effect. Some have suggested that an ancient wall in Jerusalem had a small gate called "The Needle's Eye" through which a camel might pass with some difficulty, but only without any baggage or cargo. But that gate was not built until the Middle Ages. Jesus was talking about something impossible for a human being. He emphasized that impossibility with the mental picture of a large *camel* trying to pass *through the eye of a needle*.

B. Surprised Reaction (vv. 25-27)

25. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

The shocked response of the *disciples* shows that the hyperbole Jesus used did, in fact, grab their attention. In the first century, many believed

wealth was a sign of God's favor. So, if the wealthy could not be saved, nobody could. Jesus was teaching the disciples that only God can grant salvation, not a person's actions or status. Not long before the rich young ruler approached Jesus, the disciples tried to shoo away children whom they considered a nuisance to Jesus, only to learn that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). And now, a man whom the disciples considered a "shoo-in" for the kingdom was being declared unworthy to enter it.

26. But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

Whenever people create their own categories of who is worthy or unworthy to be saved, the result can be blindness to the truth that it is *impossible* for humans to purchase their salvation (compare Acts 8:18-20). Only God can address this dilemma, which is why Jesus came to our fallen, broken world (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus' statement does not imply that rich people cannot be saved or enter into a right relationship with God. Both Abraham and Job were wealthy men. Joseph of Arimathea, who provided a tomb for Jesus' burial, is described as both a rich man and a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57). The issue comes down to what controls a person's life: wealth or God. Poverty is not a key to Heaven, nor are riches an automatic pathway to Hell. One may have great wealth and love God supremely, or one may have very little and love it more than God. It is the condition of the heart that makes the difference. Jesus concluded His parable of the rich fool with a warning to the person "that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

What Do You Think?

What steps should believers take to ensure their material wealth does not hinder their following God?

Digging Deeper

What practices and behaviors might you undertake that would result in you being "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21)?



Visual for Lesson 12. *Have this visual on display as you discuss the lesson commentary associated with Matthew 19:24.*

27. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

If any of Jesus' disciples had a comment or question in response to something Jesus said or did, it was usually *Peter* (examples: Matthew 15:15; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 9:5; John 13:8, etc.). Jesus had just challenged a rich man to relinquish control of his possessions for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. As Peter pointed out, the disciples had *forsaken all* to follow Jesus, giving up their livelihoods (Luke 5:11, 28). What rewards awaited them for their choice to leave all to follow Jesus?

C. Solemn Promise (vv. 28-30)

28. And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus did not respond in terms of an earthly reward. Instead, He spoke of what will happen *in the regeneration* (compare Luke 22:28-30). At a time when Jesus will reign in *glory*, these twelve disciples will occupy *twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. Perhaps at this point, the disciples were still thinking in terms of an earthly kingdom and an earthly throne that Jesus would establish in Jerusalem. Most likely, this regenera-

tion refers to the establishment of the new heavens and new earth that will characterize Jesus' return (2 Peter 3:10-13). The word translated as "regeneration" is quite rare in the New Testament. It occurs only twice: here and in Titus 3:5: "he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Christians anticipate the regeneration to come because of their current status of having been renewed.

29. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

A magnificent reward awaits not only those disciples standing before Jesus as He spoke but also anyone who gives up earthly possessions and relationships for His *name's sake*. The return on investment (so to speak) will be eternal. It will be a wealth that differs from anything the world can offer (compare Matthew 6:33).

The blessing of *everlasting life* is what the rich young ruler had inquired about. That life begins with the personal knowledge of Jesus as Lord (John 17:3); that life is brought to fullness by eternity with Him in Heaven. That is the life that awaited the rich young ruler had he been willing to follow Jesus on His terms.

30. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Nothing illustrates this statement better than the incident recorded in Matthew 19:13-15, just before today's text. Children (whom the disciples considered an inconvenience to Jesus) are the prime examples of what His kingdom residents should look like, while the rich (whom the disciples viewed as having a guaranteed place in the kingdom) are the least likely to dwell there.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to develop an attitude of humility reflective of God's kingdom residents?

Digging Deeper

Who will be an accountability partner to help you as you make these steps?

The Most-Coveted Airplane Seat

The passenger with the first-class seat in the front row had strong words for me. I was a customer service representative for a major airline. I understood why an airliner's first row is so sought after: it granted, among other things, the privilege of exiting the plane first. The one who occupied the seat that day, however, ended up being the last of 150 persons to exit the aircraft.

The problem was with our ground equipment. It prevented us from bringing the passenger stairs to the plane's front door. So we had to go with our backup plan and use the stairs at the rear of the aircraft. As a result, those expecting to be first off the plane became last off, and vice versa. Therefore, I found myself bearing the brunt of the first-class passenger's annoyance.

Sometimes it's a good thing to desire to be first (example: 2 Corinthians 8:10). But usually, that's not a good desire because it betrays a self-centered motive. Those who take such a path will end up with the opposite of what they expect (Matthew 21:31; Mark 9:35; etc.).

And stepping outside the Bible, we encounter wisdom in this well-known axiom: "Be careful what you ask for, because you may just get it." The landscape of Christianity is littered with the wrecked ministries of high-profile preachers whose egos took over—the resulting lack of accountability followed by ministry disaster.

Saul, a one-time persecutor of Christians, came to his senses as he transitioned into being the apostle Paul (compare and contrast 1 Corinthians 4:9; 15:9; Philippians 3:4b-14). Two thousand years of hindsight reveal him to be the number one apostle, a role he did not seek but accepted as God's will. What does it take to have such an attitude today?
—J. M.

Conclusion

A. Rethinking the Boxes

The episode of the rich young ruler sounds a warning to those who want a Christian faith that will not require a change of lifestyle or a reordering of priorities. Jesus did not and does not command every seeking sinner to sell everything and

give the money away. Jesus did so to the rich young ruler because Jesus knew what the man valued. Anything we put before God in our hearts is an idol and must be dealt with in the same decisive manner. The young man wanted to ensure he had "checked all the boxes" to obtain eternal life. He sincerely believed he was on the cusp of meeting the requirements. If there was even one thing left undone, one box remaining unchecked, then surely Jesus would tell him what that was. And Jesus did! Ultimately, the man's problem was that something other than God was on the throne of his heart (compare 2 Timothy 4:10).

"Rich" is a relative term. The wealth of Solomon is legendary (1 Kings 3:13; 10:23). But none of the countless servants he had in his palace would match the efficiency and effectiveness of our "servants" of modern refrigerators, microwave ovens, etc. If he was considered to be rich, then what are we? When our hands produce wealth, do we remember who gave us those hands to do so in the first place (Deuteronomy 8:17-18; compare Daniel 4:28-33)? Paul's admonition to Timothy still applies: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17; compare Psalm 62:10).

What Do You Think?

How has this Scripture text changed your considerations on material wealth?

Digging Deeper

What will you do in light of this change?

B. Prayer

Father, strengthen us when the world's standards and priorities tempt us. Help us to take an honest look at our lives and to be honest about whether our possessions possess us. Mold us into disciples of Jesus, willing to stay the course and assured that whatever we yield control of, You will more than compensate for in ways we could never imagine. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The life that lasts puts God first.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the 10 words of the following phrases in very large letters on 10 sheets of paper, one word each: *The first will be last; the last will be first.* Distribute them randomly to class members. (If your class is smaller than 10, give some learners two sheets.) Ask those receiving the sheets to stand in a line after arranging the words correctly.

Form study pairs or triads and distribute handouts (you create) with these instructions: “Give examples of how these two phrases should apply (or how you’ve seen them actually apply) in secular, nonreligious contexts. Include, as far as possible, information regarding *who, what, where, when, why, and how.*” After whole-class discussion, make a transition to Bible study by saying, “We may or may not find it easier to see how the phrases apply in a religious sense. Let’s find out.”

Option. Place in chairs the “It’s Impossible” exercise from the activity page, which you can download, for your learners to work on as they arrive.

Into the Word

For audible reading of the lesson, assign the text’s five voices to five learners, one each, who will read the words of the rich man, Jesus, the narrator, the disciples as a whole, and Peter in particular.

After the reading, ask each learner to write one (and only one) of the Ten Commandments on a slip of paper without saying anything. Promise a cash prize to anyone who writes a commandment that no one else does.

After no more than 30 seconds, call for responses and jot them on the board as they are voiced. Consult Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:7-21 as necessary. Award a cash prize of 10 cents to each participant who met the criteria for it. As you do, anticipate chuckles and groans as you say, “Let’s see how these *cents* help us make sense of the text.”

Distribute to study pairs handouts (you cre-

ate) titled “Revealing Questions.” Have these six thought-starters down the left side, with blank lines for responses extending to the right.

1. The man’s first question (v. 16)
2. Jesus’ question (v. 17)
3. The man’s second question (v. 18)
4. The man’s third question (v. 20)
5. The disciples’ question (v. 25)
6. Peter’s question (v. 27)

Include these instructions with the handout: “Work down through the list and give your impression of what the question says about the one(s) asking it. Work quickly—give a first impression, taking no more than a minute on each.”

After no more than six minutes, call time and invite responses in whole-class discussion. Compare and contrast learners’ ideas. Use the information in the commentary to correct misconceptions.

Option. For a deeper dive, have learners compare and contrast what is revealed about the man in his first question here with that of a different man who asks the same question in Luke 10:25.

Into Life

Make a transition by asking, “What are some ways that people today use to try to ‘get right with God?’” Encourage free input as you record responses on the board. After several minutes of this brainstorming, challenge learners to detect a common theme among elements in the list. Expect learners to discover that the theme is “Do something” or “Do more of it.” Point out that this ends up being a “trying hard, never sure” approach. Discuss ways to break this compulsion.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Wealthier than I Imagined” exercise from the activity page, to be completed as indicated. (Be sure to complete it yourself before class!) Use results to explore how your learners might find themselves having the same attitude seen in Matthew 19:22.

Ministering Mightily

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30
Background Scripture: Matthew 25

Matthew 25:31-46

31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in.

36 Naked, and ye clothed me, I was sick, and ye visited me, I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Key Text

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger, and ye took me in. —Matthew 25:34-35

A King Forever and Ever

Unit 3: Life in God's Kingdom

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Jesus' description of what will happen at the final judgment.
2. Contrast the behavior of the "sheep" with that of the "goats."
3. Write a plan to serve Jesus in the week ahead as the "sheep" do.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Not for the World
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. The Judge (Matthew 25:31-33)**
- A. Glorious Moment (v. 31)
 - B. Great Gathering (vv. 32-33)
"Not Our Thing"
- II. The Sheep (Matthew 25:34-40)**
- A. Invitation (v. 34)
Our Planning and His
 - B. Explanation (vv. 35-36)
 - C. Consternation (vv. 37-39)
 - D. Commendation (v. 40)
- III. The Goats (Matthew 25:41-46)**
- A. Rejection (v. 41)
 - B. Explanation (vv. 42-43)
 - C. Consternation (v. 44)
 - D. Condemnation (vv. 45-46)

Conclusion

- A. Three Functions
- B. Where's Jesus?
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Not for the World

A businessman traveled to India to represent his company at an important meeting. After the day's sessions ended, the man walked through a part of the city where lepers were being cared for. He watched as a woman tenderly washed the feet of an older man suffering from leprosy. The businessman watched for a moment, shook his head, and then said, with disdain, "Miss, I wouldn't do that for the world." Without looking up, the woman replied, "Mister, for the world, I wouldn't do it either."

To minister to others in Jesus' name often means going where most others would not. Those who do so may wonder at times whether their efforts are significant. Today's lesson reveals the answer.

B. Lesson Context

The setting of our lesson is during a busy day of teaching during the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry. As part of His "Olivet Discourse" of Matthew 24:3–25:46, Jesus taught the truth of today's lesson, probably on Wednesday of what is often called Passion Week.

The Olivet Discourse was set in motion when the disciples asked Jesus about the sign of His coming and of the end of the world (Matthew 24:3). Jesus began His reply by warning against deceptive signs and predictions of persecution (24:4-26). Then, He shifted to specifying genuine signs (24:27-35). This was followed immediately by a lengthy challenge to be ready to expect the unexpected (24:36-51).

Jesus went on to illustrate with two parables all that He had been saying: the parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) and the parable of the talents (25:14-30; in Luke 19:12-27 this is the parable of pounds).

The chapter closes with a dramatic picture of the final judgment—today's lesson of Matthew 25:31-46. Some students think this is a parable, while others do not. Parables usually compare something earthly to "the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:24, 31-34; 25:1, 14; etc.), but Matthew 25:31-46 does not have this feature. The only comparison that could result in this being consid-

ered a parable is Matthew 25:32, where the final judgment is compared with a shepherd's separation of "sheep" from "goats." However, this fits better the idea of metaphor (figurative or symbolic language) rather than a parable.

I. The Judge

(Matthew 25:31-33)

A. Glorious Moment (v. 31)

31. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.

With this declaration, Jesus was still answering the disciples' question in Matthew 24:3: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" The word *when* reinforces the certainty of Jesus' return (compare Matthew 16:27). That word also anticipates a time factor as part of the declaration. But during Jesus' earthly ministry, no one except God the Father knew the specific day of Jesus' return (24:36). The phrase *Son of man*, for its part, confirms Jesus will be the one returning since that phrase is His frequent self-designation (examples: 9:6; 16:13; 20:18; compare Daniel 7:13).

It is instructive to contrast the circumstances of Jesus' first coming (advent) with those of His second coming. The first time, in Bethlehem, He came as a baby born under very modest conditions. His return will be anything but ordinary; He will *come in his glory*, and He will be seated upon a glorious *throne*. A "multitude of the heavenly host" was present to herald Jesus' first coming, announcing His birth to shepherds near Bethlehem with the words "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:13-14). When Jesus returns, He will be accompanied by not only *all the holy angels* but also by "his saints"—godly people who have died (1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 14).

What Do You Think?

What do you have to do in order to be ready for the return of Christ the King?

Digging Deeper

If the King were to return today, how would He evaluate your faith?

B. Great Gathering (vv. 32-33)

32. And before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.

At Jesus' first coming, the angels spoke of good news to "all people" (Luke 2:10); at His return, it will be good news to some but bad news to others as everyone is *gathered* before Him. While other passages in the Bible emphasize that every person must give a personal, individual account before Jesus (examples: Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10), the focus in the verse before us is on *all nations* appearing before Him.

In the first century, many Jewish people believed that when the Messiah arrived, He would take control over powerful nations like the Roman Empire, as this verse describes. The purpose of Jesus' first coming, however, was "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus' intent was and is for all nations to receive the message of this good news (Matthew 28:19-20). His second coming will bring all nations (both ancient and modern) under the power of His mighty hand and the authority of His flawless judgment.

Judgment will result in separation, as one group is distinguished from another. Separation language is very important in the New Testament, and it always signals an evaluation of some kind for categorizing things, behavior, or people themselves. These distinctions are intended to be helpful (example: 2 Corinthians 6:17), but some are counterproductive (example: Galatians 2:12). Other key verses in Matthew regarding eternal separation are 13:40-43, 49-50.

33. And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

To be at a ruler's *right hand* was to be in the place of approval and acceptance (compare Psalm 110:1 [quoted in Hebrews 1:13]; Acts 7:55-56). It is in this prominent position that the *sheep* are placed. Note that Jesus describes only two groups. When He carries out His judgment at this gathering, there will be no middle ground, no "provisional sheep." Although we tend to view others in shades of gray, Jesus will be able to pronounce judgment clearly and decisively.

“Not Our Thing”

We spent the entire day sorting out bent nails from straight ones. My grandfather, who grew up during the Great Depression, believed in not wasting anything that could have a later use. That’s why he gave me and my cousins large buckets filled with nails to sort. Some were bent and could not be reused; others were straight and still usable. We viewed the task as “not our thing,” and it showed in our efforts. After sorting for a while, the nails all seemed to look alike.

We are called to use specific evaluations in the church (example: 1 Corinthians 5). As we do, we are careful to recognize a boundary: those processes do not put us in the place of Jesus as the ultimate judge. We cannot infallibly see the motives in a person’s heart, but He can (Luke 5:22; 6:8; John 2:25). Today’s lesson reminds us that the Son of Man is the one who will gather all the nations and distinguish between the righteous (sheep) and the unrighteous (goats). This is a responsibility that Jesus does not delegate; it is “not our thing.”

What *is* our thing, however, is to be aware of the state of our own heart. How can we ensure that proper, godly motives stand behind our works of service to Jesus? —J. M.

II. The Sheep

(Matthew 25:34-40)

A. Invitation (v. 34)

34. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Speaking as *the King*, Jesus’ first pronouncement is to those *on his right hand*, the sheep of the analogy. Their invitation to *inherit the kingdom prepared for them* is an invitation to enter Heaven. The fact that this kingdom has been ready for them since *the foundation of the world* alludes to the truth of Genesis 1:1.

Even now, Christians belong to the kingdom of Jesus, having been delivered from the realm of spiritual darkness (Colossians 1:13). We wait for the ultimate consummation of that kingdom, even as Paul did (2 Timothy 4:18).

What Do You Think?

What significance do you see in the statement that the kingdom was “prepared for you from the foundation of the world”?

Digging Deeper

How would you describe the joys of this kingdom to someone who had never before heard this good news?

Our Planning and His

When our kids were younger, we enjoyed traveling but could not afford fancy accommodations. So, instead, we would search for campgrounds to stay overnight. One day, we traveled to Chicago to see the city and enjoy authentic Chicago-style pizza. When the night came, we drove around looking for a campground to no avail. When I asked convenience store employees for directions to the nearest place to camp, I was met with confused looks. Therefore, we spent the night sleeping in the car.

That experience became a pivotal moment in our marriage. My wife, a meticulous planner, took charge of all travel arrangements from that point forward!

Whether or not we were born with “the planning gene,” we can rest in the assurance of God being the master planner. God had planned for the inbreaking of His kingdom, salvation, and the final judgment, all in advance. One key difference between God’s planning and ours is that God is omniscient (all-knowing). He can see both the beginning and the end. There are no unforeseen circumstances to Him. He is never caught off guard like we might be in our planning. How should that fact influence your planning? Before answering too quickly, read James 4:13-17.

—J. M.

B. Explanation (vv. 35-36)

35-36. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me in. Naked, and ye clothed me. I was sick, and ye visited me. I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

The favorable verdict resulted from six ways the favored helped the king and met His needs. Their conduct is reminiscent of that in the parable about the Samaritan who met the needs of someone after others had merely passed by (Luke 10:30-34).

Such a heavy emphasis on doing good to others may indicate that Judgment Day will be a time for counting up such deeds and calculating our “final score.” So how does Jesus’ commendation of good works here square with the biblical teaching on salvation by grace? In truth, salvation encompasses both divine initiative and human response. Salvation by God’s grace results in appropriate good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). We are not saved *by* works, but we are saved *for* works—a point James makes especially clear (James 2:14-26).

What Do You Think?

What are specific ways our congregation can address the six needs of people given in this story?

Digging Deeper

What education or training might your congregation need to address these needs effectively?

C. Consternation (vv. 37-39)

37-38. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Those designated as “sheep” are also *the righteous*. They will express their confusion at being told they were serving Jesus the King during their acts of mercy. They had seen themselves as meeting the needs of ordinary people, not Jesus. When had they ever encountered Jesus during such times?

39. Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

The last act of mercy mentioned is the most fascinating of all. Prisons in the ancient world were not places of long-term incarceration as they are today. Prisons back then were places of short-term custody where perpetrators awaited either (1) corporal punishment such as flogging and then



Visual for Lesson 13. Have this visual on display as you review the discussion questions associated with Matthew 25:35-36.

release or (2) execution. At what point would the righteous sheep ever have encountered King Jesus in such a place, especially after His ascension (Acts 1:9)? The answer comes next.

D. Commendation (v. 40)

40. And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Here is the answer to the sheep’s bewilderment. Whatever the sheep have done to help even *the least of these my brethren*, they have done it to the greatest of all, King Jesus. The word *brethren* indicates Christians—those who have accepted the kingship of Jesus (compare John 1:12-13; Hebrews 2:11). This does not mean, however, that we have the freedom to ignore the needs of those who are not followers of Jesus (compare Proverbs 3:27; 25:21-22; Matthew 5:45; Galatians 6:10). Throughout Jesus’ life, the least and lowliest of the people in His surroundings received special attention.

At this point in our reading of the text, some may ask, “If Jesus is providing these details about the final judgment, will we even raise such questions as the sheep are pictured as asking since we already know what the answer is?” Perhaps the element of surprise will occur as each of us individually comes before Jesus to be judged (2 Corinthians 5:10). There, we will see the true impact of our service to others. We likely will be astonished

to discover the occasions when we were serving Jesus and did not realize it.

What Do You Think?

How might our faith be strengthened if we think of our ministry to others as being directed to Jesus himself?

Digging Deeper

What are some “roadblocks” that prevent you from ministering to others, and how will you address these things?

III. The Goats

(Matthew 25:41-46)

A. Rejection (v. 41)

41. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Next, Jesus will address the goats, those on His *left*. Note how the command to this group is exactly the opposite of that given to the group on Jesus’ right. The sheep will be invited to “come”; the goats will be ordered to *depart*. The sheep will be called “blessed”; the goats will be called *cursed*. One group will inherit a kingdom; the other will be sent *into everlasting fire*.

Unlike the sheep, the goats won’t be sent to a place that has been prepared just for them. Instead, the goats are to be sent to the place *prepared for the devil and his angels* (compare Revelation 20:10, 14-15; 21:8).

B. Explanation (vv. 42-43)

42-43. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat. I was thirsty, and ye gave me no

drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

King Jesus will confront the goats with the fact of having faced the same groups in need that the sheep faced. But whereas the sheep are pictured as having helped people in need, the goats chose to ignore those people. It is rather sobering to consider that the goats are not accused of doing anything evil—like murder, adultery, or theft. Rather, they are condemned for doing nothing. They had opportunities to meet needs, just as the sheep had. But the goats chose to look the other way. Sins of commission and sins of omission can both be sins (James 4:17)!

C. Consternation (v. 44)

44. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

The goats will react with the same surprise that the sheep exhibited. The sheep will be astonished to be considered as having helped Jesus when they helped those in need; the goats no doubt will reason that had they realized the danger of their lack of action, they would have been more than eager to help. However, such logic is flawed, as it is circular. The goats will have no excuse (compare 1 John 3:17).

D. Condemnation (vv. 45-46)

45. Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

The failure of the goats to address the needs of others is a failure to serve Jesus (compare James 4:17). This is an image reversed from that of the sheep.

46. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.

It is virtually impossible to imagine a greater contrast between the *everlasting punishment* that awaits the goats and the *life eternal* that awaits the sheep (compare Galatians 6:8-10). The words *everlasting* and *eternal* have the same meaning here, since they are translations of the same Greek word.

How to Say It

Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Pontius Pilate	Pon-shus or Pon-ti-us Pie-lut.
propitiation	pro-pih-she-ay-shun.
Samaritan	Suh-mare-uh-tun.

The goats' endless punishment will be where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48, quoting Isaiah 66:24). Hell is a place of unspeakable torment.

In contrast, eternal life awaits those numbered among the sheep (compare and contrast Daniel 12:2; John 5:29). Nothing is said in today's passage about this life other than it is eternal. But other portions of Scripture provide insights concerning it. The book of Revelation describes a heavenly city, eternally bright, inhabited by only the redeemed. It is a place where "the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4)—everything associated with a sin-cursed, broken world. God will be with His people, and they will be with Him—forever.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that a loving God would not allow a person to experience everlasting punishment?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind to support your answer?

Conclusion

A. Three Functions

In today's passage, Jesus holds three positions: the *king* on His glorious throne (Matthew 25:31, 34), a *shepherd* dividing sheep from goats, and the *judge* determining the eternal destinies of those gathered before Him. We must keep in mind the unique manner in which Jesus exercised each of these roles. He is no ordinary king, shepherd, or judge.

King. Pontius Pilate brought Jesus before the crowd and proclaimed sarcastically, "Behold your King!" (John 19:14). Pilate spoke better than he knew: Jesus was indeed a king, but not one of this world (6:15; 18:36; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). We want to stand confidently before King Jesus on Judgment Day in anticipation of inheriting the kingdom. Therefore, we must realize that meeting the needs of others means serving our king.

Shepherd. When Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd" in John 10:11, He said, "the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Jesus' death pro-

vided a propitiation (atonement) for the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2). But what has been provided must be accepted in order to be counted among the sheep under His care.

Judge. The one who said "I judge no man" during His earthly ministry (John 8:15) becomes the ultimate judge at His return—one before whom all must appear (Matthew 16:27; John 5:22-23; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

B. Where's Jesus?

We live in a time and culture when the world seems to treat the Christian faith with contempt. Such an abrasive atmosphere is predicted in 2 Peter 3:3-4: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" Even Christians might wonder *Where's Jesus?* in times of despair.

Answering that question may be compared somewhat to the *Where's Waldo?* books that have fascinated children. The books contain illustrations depicting crowds engaged in various activities at specific locations. The reader is challenged to find "Waldo" somewhere in the crowd. The key to doing so lies in Waldo's outward appearance: he can be found if one first knows how he can be recognized. Jesus makes it clear in today's passage that whenever we serve anyone in need, we are serving Him. Christians often see themselves as being the hands, feet, and voice of Jesus to other people, and rightly so. But Jesus is also seen in the needs of others around us. Do you have eyes to "see Him" in such situations?

C. Prayer

Father, there is so much brokenness and need in our world. Refresh and revive us when we feel overwhelmed. Help us not to become callous or indifferent to the hurting people around us. Clear up our spiritual vision so that we see not only others through the eyes of Jesus but also ourselves serving Jesus as we respond to needs. May we never forget that faith without works is still dead. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Jesus is closer than we realize.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

As learners enter the classroom, distribute handouts (you create) titled “Biblical Helping?” that ask for agreement (A) or disagreement (D) with the following statements:

- ___ When meeting needs, Christians should first explore the availability of government programs.
- ___ Giving cash to meet a need is often a good idea.
- ___ Meeting a need of a poverty-stricken person is best done by church committee.
- ___ The needs of an unbeliever should be treated differently than those of a fellow Christian.
- ___ When it comes to deciding *when, who, and how* to help others, Jesus should be my boss.

Expect learners to begin pondering the statements as they arrive and interact. Decide whether to discuss responses (1) right away, (2) during the Into Life segment only, or (3) in both segments, depending on the nature of your class and your teaching style.

Option. Instead of using the handouts as an agree/disagree exercise, have participants rank-order the statements from “most difficult to answer biblically” (ranked 1) to “easiest to answer biblically” (ranked 5). After discussion, lead into lesson study by saying, “Before we get too wrapped up in staking out positions, today’s lesson has a few more surprises to toss our way.”

Into the Word

Appoint two participants to read the 16 verses of the lesson text aloud, alternating with each verse. Distribute a handout (you create) that features each of these phrases as headers of three blank columns: *Identity of Sufferers | What Some Did | What Others Failed to Do*. Challenge participants, in groups of no more than four, to survey today’s printed text and fill out the columns.

After several minutes, reconvene for a whole-class discussion of the results. Ask what elements of Matthew 25:39, 44 surprise them as well.

Option. If you wish to compare and contrast individual helping responsibilities with the church’s collective responsibilities and procedures, distribute copies of the “Collective Helping and Jesus’ Expectations” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants complete it as indicated in their previously formed groups. (Note: this exercise can be time-consuming. You may wish to save it until the end of the Into Life segment.)

Into Life

Create five columns on the board that feature the following five headers, one per column: *Lacking Sustenance | Lacking Emotional Support | Lacking Clothing | Lacking Good Health | Lacking Freedom*. Work across these five issues with this question as you move from one to the next: “How would we recognize when someone is having problems in this area?” Jot responses under the appropriate header as participants voice them.

After filling out the five columns, work back through them again with this additional question for each of the five columns in turn: “What would be a good plan for meeting this type of need?” As participants voice their ideas, press the issue deeper by having learners distinguish between needs that are best responded to by individuals in contrast with the needs that are best responded to by the church as a whole. Then, pose these case studies:

Case study 1. John volunteers with a secular organization to distribute meals to older adults. Since his work is not done in Jesus’ name, does it “count” for him as being a “sheep” in terms of Matthew 25:31-46? Why, or why not?

Case study 2. Mary buys a car from a company that donates money to benevolent causes from every vehicle sold during its “Share the Love” event. Does it count for Mary’s being a “sheep”?

Option. Distribute copies of the “Don’t Let the Message Fall Away!” puzzle as a take-home.

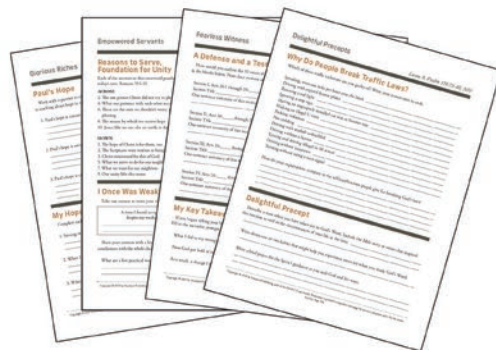
Discover Free Lesson Helps & Tips at StandardLesson.com



Connect the timeless truth of Scripture with today's news and current events.

Weekly Teacher Tips

Insights and ideas for effective teaching from the editors of the Standard Lesson will help you present each lesson with variety and creativity.



Activity Pages

These reproducible pages engage students in the Involvement Learning plan suggested within each lesson.

Standard Lesson Newsletter

- Classroom Tips article to help you become a more effective teacher
- An overview of the lesson content that will be covered in the upcoming month **StandardLesson.com**



SIGN UP TODAY

Go to **StandardLesson.com** and choose **SUBSCRIBE**

Standard LESSON

The Best Interactive Biblical Resource to Help Kids Put Their **FAITH IN ACTION!**



The Action Bible: Faith in Action Edition presents a new level of Bible engagement for kids and teens. The 230 vivid illustrated Bible stories have been updated with a system to deepen readers' understanding of how Scripture demonstrates God's eternal attributes. Discoverable QR codes lead to a collection of digital resources to amplify the understanding of God's Word through:



Readers can identify major themes of the Bible using badges that connect them to the journey of faith experienced by characters in the Bible. Each theme offers an engaging pathway to study God's Word with life application resources that transform Bible knowledge and faith into action. *The Action Bible: Faith in Action Edition* will help readers better understand God's Word, grow in Christ, and live out their faith!

DAVID C COOK®
transforming lives together

Available from David C Cook
and everywhere books are sold

Standard®
PUBLISHING
part of the David C Cook family

A Adult
KJV Bible Teacher
No. 6290