



JUNIOR BIBLE TEACHER

WINTER

December 2018,

January,

February 2019

For Teachers of children
Ages 9 Through 11

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Junior Bible Teacher

WINTER QUARTER

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Dear Junior Teacher:

Every now and then it is good to try a new approach. Get a fresh start. Think a different way.

If you thumb through the current teacher and class quarterlies, you will notice that they look a bit different from previous quarters. With a new way of thinking about our teaching material for juniors, we have chosen to make some changes. We hope that these modifications will not only make your job easier but also will better draw the interest of the children.

To describe the new aspects of *Junior Bible Teacher* and *Junior Bible Class*, it is probably best to start with the class book. One of the most noticeable differences you will see is that we have added clip-art type graphics into each lesson. Our reasoning is that juniors will be much more likely to read the text once their interest is piqued by the graphics. Although the lesson material had to be reduced to allow for this, if our assessment is correct, the trade-off will certainly be worthwhile.

You may also notice that the class quarterly now has main headings inserted into the lesson. This should readily aid the reader in knowing the topics covered in the lesson. It also divides the page up into smaller “bite-size” sections that will not seem as intimidating as two full columns of print.

Another new feature in the class book is the short special interest article that follows the lesson. Juniors typically enjoy hearing about unique things in foreign lands, amazing feats and facts, odd history, and things that have an air of mystery. The goal is to draw the students’ interest by using these kinds of topics while also offering a meaningful Bible truth that relates to the week’s lesson in some way.

The activity section remains much the same as before but with a somewhat different mind-set. Besides doing away with the customary “Secret Codes for Juniors,” we will also work to make the activities more than simple fill-in-the-blanks and multiple choice. A dose of fun and humor may also be included where appropriate.

One other significant improvement is how the lesson is presented in both the teacher and class quarterlies. An attempt has been made to make both quarterlies have the same lesson material. The wording may at times be slightly different, and possibly the teacher’s manual will have a little extra material, but normally the lessons will be essentially the same. This should aid you as a teacher since you will know what your students are reading.

The last item to mention is the “Daily Bible Readings” section that used to be offered in both the teacher and class quarterlies. As you probably are already aware, we at Union Gospel Press are now producing two separate lesson tracks—one for juniors and below and another for older ages and adults. As a result, it was decided that the “Daily Bible Readings” feature works best for the older age group. We have chosen to include other worthy material instead.

It is our heartfelt desire to offer the best Bible teaching material we can and to aid you in the world-changing task of giving God’s truth to the children of today. We would be pleased to hear any feedback you might have about these new changes. May God bless you as you serve our wonderful Saviour!

In Jesus’ name,

Todd Williams

Open the Door

Think back to your childhood, and think about the various teachers you have had. You probably remember some that you found annoying, boring, or even scary and others who were caring, encouraging, and enjoyable to be with. Which ones would you say you most likely strived to please? Which ones did you learn the most from? The answer to that question may reveal an important reality that can help you as a teacher.

What is the central issue in helping children in a way that has an eternal impact? Certainly many have tried to answer this question, and many different ideas have been proposed and implemented. It would be difficult for anyone to give a full and meaningful response to such a complex issue. However, in this article, we will address one particular aspect of teaching children that has been proven to be most effective in creating the most lasting and meaningful difference in children's lives.

Consider this: a teacher may prepare for Sunday school class in very organized and commendable ways, teach a well-informed lesson, and yet fail in actually reaching the students' hearts. We might attribute such a failure to any number of weaknesses and shortcomings in the class setting, the students, the teaching style, or even the teaching material. While all of these aspects may play a role, there is certainly a deeper issue that we must uncover.

Since the real purpose of Sunday school is eternal, should we as teachers ever be satisfied with leaving the children's hearts unchallenged and unchanged? What can be done to improve our effectiveness in helping our students in an eternal

way? I believe that one of the primary solutions to this concern is simple: we must build meaningful relationships.

A number of psychological studies have shown that a child's level of learning increases significantly when a caring teacher is presenting the material. The warmer the feelings the child has for the teacher, the more he or she takes an interest in what is being taught. Clearly the opposite would also be true: the weaker the child/teacher connection, the less a student learns. As messengers of God's truth, we should want to take every advantage we can in helping children learn each Sunday.

Even with a proper emphasis on teaching techniques, learning activities, and doctrinal clarity, when students do not feel connected with the person leading the class, the impact is greatly diminished. It should be our goal, therefore, to gain as much of a rapport with our students as possible.

What is it that juniors enjoy? More to the point, what is it that the particular students in your class enjoy? Although enjoyment is not the only key to learning for students, it can play an essential role in your success as a teacher. It can encourage students to listen more closely to what you teach in class.

If you make a conscious effort to get involved in their lives, learn what excites or bores them, and take the time to care, you might be surprised how responsive your students can be. Keep in mind what a privilege and blessing it is to lead young minds in the ways of Christ. As you pray faithfully for your students, you may also see God doing a mighty work in their hearts!

FOR COMFORT AND CHALLENGE

RUTH COLLINS

I Am with Thee

*Sometimes life is dreary, and heavy seems my load;
It seems that I can't carry on.
But then I remember the promise of God,
"I am with thee; I won't leave thee alone."
Sometimes I am called to lay aside my plans
When sickness or death change them all;
But God is on His throne, and He is in control.
Regardless of my state, God leads me along.
I see His hand in every step.
I know beyond any doubt, God is at
Work in my life.*

A Country Called Heaven

*Let me tell you of a country
Where there are no tears or heartaches,
Where no one will suffer pain or die,
Where the people never tire
And they never grow older,
They never have to say a sad good-bye.
No one ever does a wrong.
In all hearts there is a song,
For in that land there is no sin.
Trust in Jesus as your Saviour,
And you then will live forever,
Live in heaven with the King of kings.*

Finishing Your Task

*The psalmist said our days are planned
By the God who does all things well;
We are created to do good works
And the story of salvation to tell.
Jesus finished the work God gave Him to do
When He died on the cross for us all.
What is the task He has called you to do
Before at His feet you will fall?*



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Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians to explain what God's kind of love really is like.

God's Kind of Love

LESSON TEXT: I Corinthians
13:1-13

GOLDEN TEXT—“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13).

Scripture Lesson Text

1 COR. 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to show that love is more important than anything else and to describe the different ways true love is demonstrated.

First Corinthians 13 is the most comprehensive and to-the-point discussion about love ever written. The Apostle Paul gives a thorough treatment not only of what love looks like in real life but also its importance from an eternal perspective. Take some time as you prepare during the week to ponder the weighty issues Paul addresses, and let them fill your heart.

Since this Scripture passage is not a Bible story, it may be more difficult for children to follow. However, at the junior age level, they are much more capable of considering more abstract concepts.

There is no need to be afraid to use logic and more thoughtful explanations, but it is always helpful to provide concrete examples for the more difficult concepts. There are several included in this lesson, but you may want to add your own to help clarify issues that you know your students are struggling with.

TEACHING THE LESSON

The Apostle Paul said quite a bit about one important thing for Christians. In fact, without it, just about anything a Christian does would be pointless. It is like the key to a car—without it, you will not get anywhere.

Suppose your mom is preparing a delicious homemade pizza. She has tomato sauce, pepperoni slices, and lots of yummy cheese. But she forgot one thing—the crust! What would a pizza be without a crust?

You want to fly your kite. The wind is just right and you know the kite will soar, but then you realize you are missing something—string! Without string, your kite is useless!

ALL OR NOTHING—I Cor. 13:1-3

The Apostle Paul wanted the Christians in Corinth to understand that no matter how many religious things they did, they would all become meaningless without one thing. God could have given Paul the ability to speak in lan-

guages he had never learned (like the apostles on the day of Pentecost—Acts 2:4)—even angel languages! Or God could have given him special understanding so that he could predict the future and understand even the deepest mysteries. Or Paul could have had so much faith that mountains would move when he prayed. As fantastic as those things are, Paul declared that they would all add up to a big fat zero if he did not have God's love (or charity) in his heart. Without love, Paul—and any Christian—would amount to nothing!

Love for God and others is so important that it is useless trying to please God without it. You cannot have pizza without a crust; you cannot fly a kite without a string; and you cannot truly do God's work without love!

Paul said that it would not matter a bit if he gave everything he owned to feed the poor or even gave up his life as a sacrifice! If he had no love in his

heart, it would all be a waste! Are you getting the picture? Love is really, really important!

WHAT IS LOVE?—I Cor. 13:4-7

So if love is so all-fired important, what does real love actually look like? That is what Paul explains next.

Having love, Paul says, means first that we are patient. In other words, a loving person does not get annoyed easily. Instead, love makes a person peaceful and easygoing.

A truly loving person is also not the kind of person who is envious. Envy is craving and longing for something that another person is enjoying. Love does just the opposite; it actually makes you happy when another person is enjoying something.

What if you had an old beat-up bike with a torn seat and a bent wheel; then you see the school bully ride up on a brand-spanking new ten-speed? Would that make you upset that an ornery troublemaker owns that bike instead of you? With God's love, you could be happy even for a bully!

Next, our Bibles tell us that a person with God's love is not proud and does not think too highly of himself. What if your dad were an architect and your family got to travel all over the world? If you came back to your little hometown of Podunk surrounded by farm fields, would you look down on the kids there who milk cows, shovel manure, and have never been out of their own state? If you have come to truly know God's love, you would be friendly and make the other kids feel important.

Love also causes us to behave properly. When you have love in your heart and care about the people around you, it is not hard to know what is the right way to behave.

Selfishness is something that we avoid when God's love controls our thinking. When there is only one cookie left and your little brother wants it, do

you take it? The more selfish you are, the less room there is in your heart for God's love.

Have you ever heard someone who is often angry described as having "a short fuse"? That phrase makes us think of dynamite. A long time ago, a friend of mine lit the fuse on a half stick of dynamite and threw it and ran. Then, far away, we watched. It smoked and sparked as we waited and waited and waited some more. After what seemed like forever, BOOM! The thing exploded with amazing force. I am very glad the fuse was long. Otherwise my friend might have been seriously hurt—or worse! If you know God's love, show it by having a long fuse—do not be quickly angered.

Real love keeps a person from plotting ways to get back at people who have hurt him. In fact, loving people do not even want to think about times when others have hurt or offended them. Love causes a person to think of how to do good to others, not evil. David in the Bible shows us what that kind of love is like. Even though King Saul had been trying to kill David, David honored King Saul and refused to fight back.

Paul says that loving people do not find joy in things that are evil or sinful. Instead, truth and good things make them happy.

A loving person also does not give up when dealing with troubling problems. The Bible says that we should bear one another's burdens (problems) because that is how we obey Jesus' commandment (Gal. 6:2). People who love and trust God to help them work out a problem know there is always hope.

Not only that, but a person with godly love is trusting. In other words, he or she does not normally doubt others and think they are lying.

You might think, *Why is that loving?*

Well, imagine that you missed a day of school because you were sick. What if your teacher said, “I don’t think you were sick. You probably played at the park all day.” That would certainly not be loving.

Love also makes a person hopeful. But what does love have to do with hope? They are connected because when you love people, you hope the best for them. You want to see things go well for them. Love and hope go hand in hand.

Finally, the love of God can give a person the strength to go through even the most difficult hardships. Sometimes people who say they love one another end up giving up on one another when trouble comes. But when you truly love someone, you will help him and never give up no matter how tough things get.

All these things we have talked about help to describe both the kind of love God has for us as well as the kind of love we should have for others. Stop and think; do you have this kind of love? Remember, God’s love for you is real and true, so you can love others the same way.

LOVE NEVER FAILS—I Cor. 13:8-13

Paul tells us how love is not only greater than anything else we can think of, but it also will outlast everything else. Love is never going to lose its importance. Heaven will be full of God’s love.

Some Christians are kind of childish, thinking that certain unimportant things are actually very important. But believers who are “grown-up” in their faith know that love is the main thing. The greatest thing a Christian can do is show God’s amazing love.

Right now it may not be easy to really understand life. But thankfully, when we get to heaven, we will be able to see why things are the way they are.

And although the most important

things right now are faith, hope, and love, one day we will see that only one of these has always been more important than anything. Love is the greatest thing of all.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13).

Paul singled out three things that are vitally important to believers in Christ: faith, hope, and love. All three are central to living a life that pleases our Saviour. However, one day faith will be far less important because we will be able to see and talk with Jesus in heaven.

Hope also will not be such a key part of our thinking. For as Paul explained in Romans 8:24, when what we hope for comes about, what need is there to hope for it anymore? While there will certainly still be things to hope for, there will be much less need for hope once we are in heaven.

Love, on the other hand, will surround us abundantly in heaven. Not only will love not fade away in the future, but we will also enjoy the most pure and real love we have ever felt—forever! That is one of the best things to look forward to after this earthly life.

When thinking about faith, hope, and love, love is the greatest of the three. God’s love is truly the most fulfilling of all.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Love Scramble: 1. religious; 2. languages; 3. mysteries; 4. faith; 5. poor; 6. sacrificing; 7. peaceful.



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The Levites prayed to God, confessing the sins of the nation of Israel.

God's Patient Love

LESSON TEXT: Nehemiah
9:25-31

GOLDEN TEXT—“For thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God” (Nehemiah 9:31).

Scripture Lesson Text

NEH. 9:25 And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

26 Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.

27 Therefore thou deliverdest them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.

28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that

they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies;

29 And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

30 Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to highlight God’s amazing love, patience, and grace.

Our Scripture text today gives us only part of a prayer led by the Levites on the steps of the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. All the people gathered for this occasion had been allowed to return from exile in Babylon to the ruined city of Jerusalem. The prayer is one of repentance and an expression of gratitude to God for His abundant love,

grace, and mercy.

To understand the point of this lesson, the background must be explained, and yet the most important elements are included in the prayer itself. As you show the unfaithfulness of Israel and the amazing grace of God, do not fail to apply the lesson to your students. Nothing is more important than for the children to personally recognize God’s love and mercy in their own lives!

TEACHING THE LESSON

You have probably heard a number of “rags-to-riches” stories—ones that tell of people who were poor, but through some unusual happening end up living a life of luxury and power. Many fairy tales are like this: poor and hopeless maidens always somehow end up marrying a handsome prince.

But it is not often that you hear “riches-to-rags” stories—ones that tell of someone who is rich and famous who ends up poor, helpless, and lonely. Our Bible story for today has a happy ending, but to truly understand it, we must first think about a sad riches-to-rags story. It is not a story about one person who falls on hard times, though; it is about a whole nation that ended up in a miserable situation.

You are probably familiar with the beginning of the story. It opens with God making a promise to Abraham that He would bless his family, generation after generation. Not only that, but God also promised to give those who came from Abraham’s family their very own land.

Many years later, Abraham’s family grew into the nation of Israel. And God did bless them. At one point, the Egyptians forced them to work as slaves. But because the Egyptians had mistreated Israel, God destroyed Egypt with ten terrible plagues. Do you remember the plague of frogs and the water turning to blood?

God then rescued the people of Israel and led them out of Egypt. He even fed them with manna and gave them water out of a rock. Then, as if that were not enough, God gave Israel His laws and brought them into the wonderful land that He had promised.

No other nation had ever been treated with such favors from God. After all that the Israelites were able to enjoy, they should have loved God.

But what actually did happen? Not what you would expect. Today’s Bible story takes place long after all those good things had happened. We will now find out what happened to the people God had blessed so much.

UNGRATEFUL—Neh. 9:25-28

When God brought the people into their Promised Land, He gave them victory over the wicked people who lived there. As a result, the Israelites were able to live in nice homes filled with good things. They had good water and many wonderful things to eat. Everything they enjoyed had come from God.

But instead of being thankful for God's blessings, the people of Israel behaved as if they were spoiled little brats. They treated Him as if they hated Him and did many things to make God angry. Although God had given them His laws through Moses, they had no desire to obey. In fact, Israel honored and worshipped dumb idols over the one true and living God; this was a huge insult to Him.

That may sound completely awful, but the blessed people of Israel did even more to insult God. When God sent the prophets to tell His people that they were wrong, the Israelites killed them. They would not listen to anyone sent from God.

And as if that were not enough, they said terrible things about God. They insulted Him in nearly every way imaginable. Even though God had been so good to them, they acted like His bitter enemies!

What do you think God did about this? He could have easily destroyed them—wiped them out in one terrible moment. But did He? No. Instead, God tried to get Israel to turn back to Him. The way He did this was by letting Israel's enemies beat them in battle and even make them slaves. The Israelites hated having their enemies control them. They would whine and complain about this until one day they would finally realize that God was the only one who could help them.

Although God could have left the Israelites under the control of their enemies to teach them a lesson, He again

showed them grace and mercy. When they called on God for help, He sent someone to rescue them.

Do you see God's kindness? He had sympathy for them in their misery, even though they deserved everything they got. This is one of the most wonderful things we can learn about God: even when the people He loves hate Him and do everything they can to disobey and reject Him, His love keeps going.

It is sometimes easy to think we have sinned against God too much or disobeyed Him too many times. But your sins do not have to separate you from God; you can turn to Him and ask for forgiveness. That is what He really wants.

But there is still more to learn from the story about sinful Israel. As we said, the people were in the hands of their enemies, and God sent people to rescue them. You probably know who some of those rescuers are. The Bible book of Judges tells of many of them—people such as Gideon, Deborah, and Samson. Through these leaders, God helped Israel escape the clutches of their enemies.

Now what do you think the people of Israel did once they finally were free again? You might think that they became so thankful that they chose to obey and please God—but you would be wrong. Against all reason and common sense, Israel went right back to disobeying God and worshipping dumb idols! It happened over and over again. They disobeyed, God put their enemies in control, Israel cried to God for help, He rescued them, and then they went right back to disobeying Him. What a shameful way to live!

UNASHAMED—Neh. 9:29-30

God's patience seemed like it could never run out. He sent prophets again and again who warned Israel to turn away from their sin and idol worship. He made certain that they knew how to avoid going back into slavery to their enemies. But did they listen? Not

even a little bit.

So do you think God's patience could never ever run out? The truth is God's patience did run out. He was not willing to keep letting them enjoy all His blessings while they stubbornly disobeyed and scorned Him.

God sent the wicked Babylonians to destroy the nation of Israel. Many thousands of the people were killed; others were carried off to Babylon in chains. God's special people no longer enjoyed the freedom and comforts of the land He had given to them. They were now treated as slaves in a foreign land. I think you would agree that this is a very sad riches-to-rags story.

UNBOUND—Neh. 9:31

You might remember, though, that I said this story has a happy ending. Here is what I mean. Although God had punished His people severely, our lesson is taken from the book of Nehemiah, which tells about how God amazingly brought some of the people back to live in the land of Israel. In fact, almost everything in this lesson is taken from a prayer that was prayed on the steps of the newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. It was a prayer of repentance. The men who prayed admitted all the awful things that they and the rest of Israel had done in the past. They had finally started doing what was right.

More than that, they now were grateful to God for His unbelievable kindness and patience. Finally they were ready to love God and obey Him with all their hearts! Are you?

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“For thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor

forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God” (Nehemiah 9:31).

“Mercy.” What does this word mean? There are two important parts to know about this wonderful word. First mercy, as the word is used in this verse, has to do with loving care.

Mothers are usually the first ones who come to mind when we think of someone who cares about us. Even if the whole world turns against us, we can count on our mothers to love us. This is the kind of love that the Bible says is a part of mercy.

Second, mercy is also choosing to not give people the punishment they deserve. And that choice is made because of the love we talked about before.

Imagine if you were told not to play near your mother's antique china cabinet. But because you were having fun with your friend, you forgot the rule and ended up smashing the glass door on the cabinet. Your mother is heartbroken over the ruined antique and very angry with you. What would you deserve? You would deserve swift and harsh punishment for your carelessness. But your mother, simply because she loves you so much, might not give you such a terrible punishment.

Mercy is love that keeps a person from getting the harsh punishment he deserves. The people of Israel deserved dreadful punishments for what they had done. There were many times when God could have in His justice wiped them out for the terrible things they had done. Instead, because of His love for His people, God had shown them mercy and great kindness. That is why the people were so grateful as they stood and prayed at the temple. Never forget that we also should be grateful for God's mercy toward us.



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Mary visited her relative Elisabeth and praised God for His great goodness.

Rejoicing in God's Love

LESSON TEXT: Luke 1:39-56

GOLDEN TEXT—"Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47).

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 1:39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

43 And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord,

47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.

50 And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.

54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy;

55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to emphasize the love of God shown to Mary and all who are truly humble.

Although today's Scripture tells a story, it mostly contains the Spirit-inspired exclamations of Mary and her relative Elisabeth. God had chosen Mary to bear His Son, Israel's Messiah. Even more than the wonder of the incarnation, this reality brought joy. Both Mary and Elisabeth reveled in the love of God, who was fulfilling His promises to His people.

As you relate the details of what Elisabeth and Mary said, offer reminders of the history of Israel and the gloomy situation the Jewish people found themselves in. The judgment of God seemed to be evident in everyday life as they felt the scourge of Roman oppression.

Even Mary's name gives this impression. Its basic meaning is "bitter" (com-

pare an alternate form of the name in Exodus 15:23 and Ruth 1:20). A great many women were named Mary (or Miriam) in the first century, as can be seen by the fact that there are at least seven different women in the New Testament with some form of this name. The feeling of bitterness was certainly strong as the Jewish people longed for their prophesied rescuer, their Messiah.

But the focus of this lesson and this quarter is the wonderful love of God. Although the Lord had made life bitter for His wayward people, His love never wavered. He would bring blessings to His people through His Son that they could never have imagined.

As you teach about the wonder of God's interaction with Mary, help the children recognize the blessing of God's love. Make sure they understand what the love of God means for them personally.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Do you remember what happened in the last lesson? God's people, the nation of Israel, had sinned and rebelled against God for hundreds of years. God punished them many times, but finally, He let the Babylonians destroy the people of Israel and carry off nearly every survivor in chains. It was not until God brought some of them back to their ruined land seventy years later that the people truly became grateful for God's love for them.

Our Bible story for today happened about four hundred years after that time. Although the number of people in Israel had grown greatly, they still were

not free. Powerful empires had ruled over them—the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and now the Romans.

The ancient prophets of Israel had foretold the coming of a Messiah—one who would rescue God's people and bring great peace and joy. But now, after so many years, many Jews in Israel were wondering why God had not fulfilled that promise.

Although it seemed that God's people were all but forgotten, things changed in a surprising way. This week we will find out how this happened by learning about a young Jewish woman named Mary.

LEAPING BABY—Luke 1:39-45

Mary was a girl probably still in her teen years. She lived in the small town of Nazareth and was probably much like all the other girls around her. And yet God chose to do something astonishing in her life. He had not forgotten His people, Israel. God sent an angel to Mary to give her the most unusual and exciting news possible: Mary was going to become the mother of the Messiah, God's very own Son!

How could anyone know how to react to that news? It might have been less shocking to a queen or princess, but for young, ordinary Mary this must have been beyond amazing. As you might imagine, she had a hard time believing; so the angel told her something that would help her. Mary's relative Elisabeth was also going to have a baby! Maybe that does not sound very meaningful until you know that Elisabeth was an old woman (only young women have babies!). God was doing a miracle in her life too!

No one around Mary would understand or accept what was happening to her. God had told her she was going to have a baby—but she was not even married yet! She needed to talk to someone who could understand the miracle God was doing in her life. So she did something that made a lot of sense: she went to visit Elisabeth.

From the moment Mary walked through Elisabeth's door, they had a special friendship. When Mary spoke her greeting, Elisabeth was instantly filled with God's Holy Spirit and loudly exclaimed, "Mary, you are blessed more than all women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" (cf. Luke 1:42). Elisabeth felt greatly honored to be visited by the future mother of God's Messiah.

Elisabeth then told Mary a curious thing: at the sound of Mary's voice, the baby inside Elisabeth jumped for joy. Do you know who that baby was? It

was John the Baptist, and the Bible tells us he was filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth (Luke 1:15).

REJOICING MOTHER— Luke 1:46-50

When one person overflows with joy in the Holy Spirit, often others join in. When Elisabeth was done speaking, Mary too was filled with the Spirit as she praised God, her Saviour. She felt overwhelmed that God would show her such favor. She recognized that she was a humble servant, not royalty or some great person. She was just a simple, average girl.

Think about it: at that time Mary was not much older than you. What would it be like for God to trust you with such an important job? She would have to give birth to God's Son Jesus and raise Him as her own child. That would be hard even for an adult let alone a teenager!

What about you? Do you think God could give you something to do? The truth is, He loves young people and He often uses them in accomplishing His plans. Samuel was a boy when he began to serve God. It was a young girl who told Naaman that Elisha could heal his leprosy. And who could forget young David fighting the giant Goliath?

Children are never too young or too small to be a part of God's work. Maybe you could pray and ask the Lord to give you a way to serve Him.

Mary went on to talk about the love God had shown her. As strong and mighty as He is, He was willing to bestow a great honor on someone who was weak and lowly. She praised the Lord and His holy name for blessing her in such an amazing way.

PRAISING GOD—Luke 1:51-56

The rest of what Mary said reminds us not only of how great God is but also how great His love is for those who are humble and needy. Let us think right

now about all the things Mary spoke of that show God's great love.

First, God is full of mercy. Mercy is showing kindness and love toward those who do not deserve it. The word "mercy" is often used in Scripture to describe God forgiving people's sins instead of punishing them. Mary said that God shows mercy to all those who fear Him. She knew that even though the nation of Israel had sinned greatly against God, He protected and cared for the few who feared and obeyed Him.

Mary also remembered the strong and mighty things God had done for those He loved. One event that Mary was probably thinking of was when God humbled the mighty pharaoh of Egypt. God had sent ten terrible plagues upon the land of Egypt, leaving it in ruins as He brought His own people out of slavery. The Lord has power over everything in the world and can bring down even the mightiest kings and rulers—including presidents and leaders of countries today.

On the other hand, God loves to lift up the humble. What Mary said agrees with the words of James 4:6, which says that God works against those who are proud but gives grace to humble people. Who are these humble people? Are they always shy and quiet, afraid to say anything that is different from what others say? No, being humble comes from understanding that God is great and holy and all-powerful. Humble people also have a habit of seeing others as better than themselves (cf. Phil. 2:3).

Are you a humble person who honors God as Master and treats others well? Or do you proudly live your life your own way? Remember, God treats the two kinds of people very differently.

Never forget Mary, who was humble before God and rejoiced to serve Him. She is a wonderful example of what we should be like.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

"Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour" (Luke 1:46-47).

Find a magnifying glass and look at an object through it. With this tool you are able to see details more clearly. Mary, filled with joy because of the Lord's work in her life, said that her soul magnified the Lord. Ponder that for a moment. You might say that through Mary, we can see the wonderful goodness and wisdom more clearly. In her praise, she magnified the complexity and greatness of God the Father.

From an earthly perspective, Mary was an unlikely person to become the mother of God's only begotten Son. Although many believe she was in the royal line of David, she held a lowly station in life. There is no indication that she was known as anything more than an ordinary young woman from a town that had a less-than-stellar image (cf. John 1:46).

From God's perspective, however, Mary presented an opportunity to display His divine grace in lifting up the humble and blessing the lowly in heart. Those who trust in themselves (Luke 18:9) do not respond to God's goodness with gratefulness. On the other hand, those who recognize, like Mary, that they are unworthy respond to God's grace with hearts full of joy and praise. Their words and behavior magnify the excellence and perfection of the One who chose to send His own Son to be our Saviour.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Code Mode: Mary, Nazareth, angel, news, chosen, birth, Messiah, Son, praised, miracle.



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Mary miraculously gave birth to Jesus, just as the angel had told Joseph in a dream.

God So Loved the World

(Christmas)

LESSON TEXT: Matthew
1:18-25; John 3:16-17

GOLDEN TEXT—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Scripture Lesson Text

MATT. 1:18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be

fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

JOHN 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to help children understand the importance of Jesus' birth and how it relates to them.

For many children, the Christmas story is quite familiar—too familiar! They know all about the manger in the stable and the shepherds and the wise men. What often gets lost in all the intriguing and wonderful details is that His purpose in being born was our salvation (Matt. 1:21).

As you talk with your students about the Christmas story, try to help them understand the divine purpose behind

Jesus' birth. This week's passage lends itself well to that end. The angel explains that Jesus would bring salvation, and Matthew shows that God had revealed this central part of His plan to the prophets. These facts lead naturally to the jewel of truth in John 3:16.

Although Christmas is a busy time with many distractions, do not miss the opportunity to speak to the most important need of your class—their salvation. This Christmas season may very well be the best occasion for presenting the truth of the gospel.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Imagine it is time for your birthday party. There are balloons and streamers and decorations everywhere. Your mom has baked a big beautiful cake with "Happy Birthday!" written across it. You can hardly wait until all your friends and family arrive.

Finally, cars begin pulling up in the drive and even on the lawn. You are jumping up and down with excitement. But as people stream in the door with gifts and hugs, they turn their backs on you and go into another room. You want to see your friends and cousins, but they all go in the backyard to play with your toys without even saying hello. As the party gets going, you realize no one is paying any attention to you. In fact, when it is time to open the gifts, the guests tear them open and leave none for you!

What a strange birthday party that would be—to ignore the one who is being celebrated! If you think that is not right, then be careful this Christmas not to ignore Jesus; it is His birthday

we are celebrating. He deserves all our attention.

Our Scripture passage for today tells of Jesus' birth, but it also explains why He was born. The way things happened when Jesus was born was very different from what happened to any of us. That is because Jesus was born to be the Saviour for people all over the world and in every age.

DOUBTS AND A DECISION— Matt. 1:18-19

Mary was a young woman who lived in the out-of-the-way town of Nazareth. As we talked about last week, God did a miracle in her life. An angel told her that she would be the mother of Jesus the Messiah, the Saviour for the whole world. Since Mary was just an ordinary girl, this seemed beyond amazing—why would God choose her? It was the truth, though, and God miraculously caused her to become pregnant.

There is another part to the story,

though, that shows how unusual and challenging this was for Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. He was a good man—one who obeyed God’s law. The problem was that Joseph was not aware of the miracle that God had done in Mary’s life.

So when Joseph found out that Mary was going to have a baby, he understood right away that he could not be the baby’s father. And Joseph did not believe it would be right for him to raise another man’s child. It seemed to him that the only good thing to do was break his engagement with Mary. (In those days, this was thought of as divorce.) He was making the best decision he could with the knowledge he had.

Not only does this show that Joseph was a good man, but also the way he chose to do it shows that he was also kind and caring. He could have made sure that everyone knew he was breaking their engagement because he thought Mary had done something wrong. But he did not want to hurt Mary’s feelings or make her look bad. So he chose to keep things quiet. That was the kindest and the best thing he believed he could do for Mary.

A MESSAGE AND THE MESSIAH— Matt. 1:20-25

Although Joseph believed he was doing the right thing, it was still a hard decision. He probably loved Mary and did not really feel like breaking their engagement. But as he wrestled within himself about it, suddenly an angel from God appeared to him.

The message the angel brought could not have been more astonishing. First, the angel called Joseph a son of David. That was a way of saying that he was part of the royal family of King David. Although this was a fact, it probably seemed very strange to think of it since he did not have any authority or live in a palace.

The angel went on to say that it was OK for Joseph to take Mary as his wife. She had done nothing wrong—the baby inside her was there because of a miracle from God. How happy he must have felt to know that he could now marry his chosen bride!

But there was more good news. The angel explained that the baby Mary would give birth to was very, very special because He would save people from their sins. The Bible tells us that everyone who has ever been born is a sinner. Sin is anything that we say, think, or do that displeases God. And since God is holy, He must punish every sin—no exceptions! How can anyone escape God’s anger and judgment?

There is only one way, and that is where Mary’s baby comes in. He was no ordinary baby. The prophets of Israel had long before prophesied His birth. More important, they made it clear that He would be God Himself being born as a human. Mary’s baby was God coming to live with people!

That is why He could save His people from their sins—He was God. That is why the angel told Joseph to give the Child the name Jesus, which means “salvation” or “rescue.” Jesus rescued God’s people from the punishment for their sins by taking that punishment Himself on the cross.

As soon as the angel was gone, Joseph did exactly as the angel had said. He took Mary to his home, and she became his wife. What an amazing turn of events this was for Joseph! One day he was sad about having to break his engagement to Mary; the next, he was married and ready to help raise a child who was God in human flesh!

But best of all, it was not long before this most special of all babies was born. The Messiah, the Saviour of the world, the holy God in human flesh, was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Be

sure that you honor Him more than anything else this Christmas!

THE SON AND SALVATION— John 3:16-17

Imagine a good king who ruled over a land overflowing with evil criminals. They all cheated their neighbors, lied whenever it pleased them, and even killed people they did not like. The people thought this was a normal way of life.

But the king wanted to help the people understand what was good behavior and what was bad behavior; so he made good and wise laws. He also made certain that they knew they must obey by decreeing that those who broke his laws would be put to death. Then he sent messengers to tell everyone his laws and the penalty for breaking them.

The king dearly hoped that the people would obey him and do what was right, but they became angry instead. They did not want the king telling them what to do. In fact, there was not one person in his whole kingdom who did not break his laws. What could the king do? He declared that every one of his subjects was under the death penalty.

This is just a story, but the truth is, the Bible says in Romans 5:12 that every person is under the death penalty because everyone has sinned against God. Have you ever wondered why everyone has to die? It is because of their sin.

But this is the reason God sent Jesus to earth—to rescue people from the penalty of their sins. Everyone who trusts Jesus to forgive their sins is rescued from God's punishment of death. You might ask, But why do people still die even if they have trusted in Jesus? Jesus Himself gave the answer to that question; He said that those who believe in Him will be brought back to life—resurrected (John 11:25). Even

though believers die (perish), God will give them life forever in heaven.

Since the world is full of sinners, it would not have been surprising if God had sent His Son to destroy the whole world. But because of His love, God sent Jesus to save sinners. Jesus was born in that stable long ago for you and me. Praise God for His kindness this Christmas, and trust Jesus today!

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Jesus' birth into this world was an earthshaking event. But the reason God sent His Son into this world is just as amazing. John 3:16 tells us that God gave us His only begotten Son because He loved the world. Think about that. The world is full of sinners—those who displease God. What was there to love?

The truth is that God did not choose to love sinners because they were lovable. God loves sinners in this world because God is love (1 John 4:16). Love flows from God because that is who He is.

Because God is love, He sent Jesus into this world to rescue, or save, sinners. He bestows eternal life on those who deserve the most severe condemnation.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Crossword Craze: Across: 4. Messiah; 5. angel; 8. God; 9. everyone; 10. sin. **Down:** 1. engagement; 2. Bethlehem; 3. David; 6. Jesus; 7. Joseph.



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Jesus showed all people that God is love.

God Is Love

LESSON TEXT: I John 4:7-19

GOLDEN TEXT—“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (I John 4:8).

Scripture Lesson Text

I JOHN 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to show students that we love God and other people because God first loved us.

The reasoning and rhetoric we find in the first epistle of John is presented in a way that was typical in that time. The style, however, may seem somewhat repetitive and sometimes cyclical or even circular to us today.

A good approach to John's type of writing is to not expect to follow a specific thought through to a conclusion. He tends to mention an idea, couple it with another thought, and then repeat the first idea. Often the next section picks up on the less prominent idea in the previous discussion. The result of this kind of writing is a sort of chain of ideas, each new idea somehow being linked to a previous one.

As you can imagine, this does not lend itself well to creating an outline that fits neatly into our common main-point/sub-points way of teaching. Nevertheless, the main discussions that John launches into are certainly given depth by the layers of thought applied to them.

One useful way to study this passage is to focus on a word or a concept presented by John and then find all the other sections where he mentions it again. In this way, you could compile all the various ways he deals with that is-

sue. It may even be profitable to make a list of each statement John offers related to that particular word or idea.

Despite the unfamiliar presentation of John's thoughts, his teaching is extremely practical. He works hard to show plain facts and concepts that can be proven by observable events and actions. Consider these matter-of-fact assertions: 1. We know God loves us because He sent His Son so that we might have life (I John 4:9). 2. If we love one another, God dwells in us (vs. 12). 3. Those who fear God's punishment are not mature in God's love (vs. 18).

Because of this practical bent to John's letter, its teaching may well be very appealing to juniors. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, juniors generally dislike being forced to choose between two valid possibilities; John makes clear, unequivocal statements. Second, this age group is particularly interested in classifying and categorizing things; John gives them specific identifiers to use in categorizing people (who is a child of God (vs. 7), who knows God (vs. 8), and who is in fellowship with God (vss. 12-13).

Make the most of this opportunity to teach from I John. It lends itself especially to offering encouragement for the children to follow God in the new year.

TEACHING THE LESSON

When you have two apples and you add two more, you always—no matter what—end up with four apples (unless of course you eat one in the process!). This is just the way it is.

If you hold a bowling ball up high and then let go, it will always go down—every time. It does not rise up into the clouds or float away on the breeze. There is no need for doing fancy sci-

entific tests to know that this will happen. We just know it is true.

The book of I John in the Bible gives us many of the same kinds of truths for the spiritual realm. John lays out simple statements that are easy to understand, and we can easily see how they can be true.

You will realize as we look at the teaching in I John that sometimes it is not the understanding part that is so hard; it is accepting the simple facts as real for us and those around us.

Our passage for today is focused on love, both love between people and God's love. Get ready to learn some important truths that can help us as believers in Jesus.

GOD'S LOVE MADE PLAIN— I John 4:7-10

The first thing we need to know is that as people who have been blessed by God's love, we should naturally love one another. John makes it clear that love comes from God.

If someone wants an official autograph of his favorite athlete or musician, he has to somehow get it from that person. Having an autograph that is copied by someone else or made on a copy machine just is not the same. It is similar with love. If someone's love is genuine, you know it came straight from God. In fact, John tells us that a person with real love is a person who is born from God and knows God.

But the opposite is also true. People who have no love do not know God. Since God is love, it does not make sense for a person to be a child of God and yet be hateful. That would be like adding two and two and getting three!

John moves on to tell us more about how God's love can be seen. The clearest evidence of God's love is what He did with His Son. He sent Jesus from the pure joy and love in heaven to this sinful, hateful world. And He knew all

the time that wicked people would kill Jesus on the cross.

What do you think caused God to make such a tragic choice? It was certainly not because He hated His Son—that is unthinkable. Many places in the New Testament give us the answer: God sent His Son to die on earth because this would rescue His people from eternal punishment and make them part of His family. In other words, God sending Jesus to earth to die for us proves God's love for us.

Sometimes it is easy for people to say they love another person but then turn their backs when the person needs their help. This is not real love. Love that is genuine does what is best for the other person, even if it is difficult or painful. (Remember our first study from I Corinthians 13 that describes what real love is like? It might be helpful for you to go back and read that chapter again.)

You can usually tell if people's love is real by what they do (but not always by what they say). Since God sent Jesus to earth to die for sinners, you know His love is real. His action—which was certainly painful both to Him and His Son—proves His love.

GOD'S LOVE SEEN IN US— I John 4:11-13

John draws a direct line from God's loving action to ours. If God loved us in such a powerful way, then we should treat others with the same bighearted kind of love. It is not just words that are needed; our actions should show the love in our hearts.

The Bible tells us that no one can see God in all His holiness and live to tell about it. On the other hand, God's love can be seen very clearly in our world. Do you know why that is possible? Because God's love is visible in the words and actions of God's people. As we talked about earlier, people

who receive God's love then show His love to others.

That reality can help us make certain whether we truly know God. John plainly states that if we sincerely love our brothers and sisters in Christ, then God's Spirit is truly living inside us. (And if we do not love them, then He certainly is not dwelling in us.) Not only that, but also what God started by showing love to us is not actually complete until we show that same godly love to others.

It is much like parents and children. Most children have a number of the same physical traits that their parents have. Sometimes you can see the resemblance by looking at their hair or their eyes or the way they walk. People who are spiritual children of God also have traits of their Heavenly Father. But the main trait to look for is love—since God is love, all His children are loving.

GOD'S LOVE ACCEPTED— I John 4:14-16

What if your father told you that someday he would get you a puppy for your birthday? You would likely trust him. But when you actually saw the puppy run toward you and start licking your hand, you would have no doubts at all.

In a similar way, we have no doubts that God's love is real because He sent Jesus to this world. We know He loves us. Those who believe that Jesus is God's Son sent to be the Saviour of the world can say that confidently. And believers are those who experience God's love and His presence with them.

GOD'S LOVE COMPLETE— I John 4:17-19

God has shown His amazing love to us, and as a result, we love God. The love goes full circle. Because of that love, we do not fear God's judgment. Since God puts His Spirit in believers,

they become like Jesus in their thoughts and actions.

If our love for God is halfhearted, fear can creep in and make us afraid that God will judge us. But a heart that is full of love for God is not fearful of punishment. The only ones who are afraid of God's judgment are those whose love for God is weak.

When we think about how we came to love God, it is very clear that it did not start with us. Our sinful hearts made us enemies of God. Thankfully, God's love reached us while we were still rebels against God. Praise God that we came to love Him because He loved us first!

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (I John 4:8).

We have all known church members who know how to “play the church game” but who treat other members with disrespect and even scorn. Is their behavior a sign that they are unregenerate? One might make that case based on John's teaching in this verse. Surely every believer has room for spiritual growth; but as John indicates, since God is love, genuine love will never be absent from the life of a child of God.

What does real love look like? Being kind to everyone, even the people that you do not like that much. We should treat everyone with respect, for each person has been made by God. If a friend or even someone who is not kind to us asks for help, we should help him. That is real love.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Prove Your Case: 1. d, e; 2. a; 3. b, f; 4. c, d; 5. d.



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God told Moses that He would send him to Pharaoh to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

God Truly Cares

LESSON TEXT: Exodus
2:23—3:10

GOLDEN TEXT—“The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, . . . for I know their sorrows” (Exodus 3:7).

Scripture Lesson Text

EXOD. 2:23 And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage.

24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

25 And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

3:1 Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.

2 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.

5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

6 Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

7 And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8 And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to show that God truly does love us, even when circumstances are painful.

Life is full of frustrations, problems, and outright tragedies. One of the favorite accusations of atheists against Christianity is, How could a good and loving God not use His power to stop terrible and evil events? Believers whose faith is anchored in the reality of God's love are not shaken by such attacks.

God's plans are multidimensional—things that may seem out of place now truly are not in the wider context of God's eternal work. All things will be explained one day, and the depth of God's love will be abundantly clear.

Sin and evil are not God's work, but if they did not exist, how would we know God's great power to mete vengeance upon the wicked, who so richly deserve it? How would we know the joy of God's salvation if we had never felt the dread grip of sin and death? Those who are in the embrace of God's love know that it is felt most intensely in the midst of heartache and tragedy.

Today's lesson emphasizes not only God's intention to rescue the Israelites

from slavery but also His identification with His people's pain and sorrow. Yes, we see God calling Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt; but notice that God prefaces His instructions with an emphasis on His empathy and compassion for His suffering people.

Take the time to let your class ponder the strength and passion of God's love. Remind them that no matter how frustrating, unfair, or dark life might become, the love of God is never absent. In fact, His love is the reason for even our very existence.

Consider the difference between Moses' initial attempt to help Israel in his own strength (murder) and the way God would use Moses to deliver Israel. Rather than having Moses foment a slave revolt, God caused the Egyptians to usher His people out of the land and shower them with gifts. No one but God could have orchestrated such an incredible outcome. God's love always accomplishes far more for His people than any injury caused by the oppression and mistreatment of the wicked. In God's love, we are more than conquerors!

TEACHING THE LESSON

GOD'S PEOPLE WERE SLAVES— Exod. 2:23-25

When you cry, do you wail at the top of your voice, or do you cry quietly so that no one hears you? The Israelites were slaves, and the Egyptians were their masters. Israel wept bitterly. They did not hide it.

Thankfully for them, the Lord heard their crying. He cared about the tribe of people who came from Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob. God had promised to bless Abraham's family throughout all ages. This promise is called a covenant. Through it God showed loyal love to Abraham's whole family.

MOSES THE SHEPHERD— Exod. 3:1-3

God did amazing things because of that covenant with Israel. Today's Bible story tells about one of those

things, and it might seem a little strange—He set a bush on fire. This bush was on a mountain. Near the bottom of that mountain was a very interesting shepherd named Moses. He was born an Israelite, but he had not always been a shepherd. In fact, an Egyptian princess adopted him when he was a baby; so he had grown up in the royal palaces of the very nation who was hurting his own Israelite people.

Forty years earlier, Moses had been forced to leave Egypt and run for his life. That is when he became a shepherd. As Moses led his sheep in the wilderness, he noticed the bush that God had set on fire. It kept burning but never burned up! He just had to find out why.

GOD CALLS MOSES—Exod. 3:4-6

As Moses came closer, God’s voice called to him out of the bush: “Moses! Moses!”

“Here I am,” said the shaking shepherd.

God warned Moses not to come any closer. God then told him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground (this was a way to show respect as he stood before God). Moses was even more afraid now. He was afraid to look at the bush!

GOD KNEW—Exod. 3:7-10

God spoke again. He said He knew all about the awful things the slave masters were doing to His people. God cared about their pain. He was ready to rescue them out of Egypt and take them to a wonderful new land where they would be free.

But God surprised Moses by what He said next: “You are going to lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” What a job!

God loved His people. He cared when they suffered and wanted to rescue them from slavery and give them a fantastic new land.

God loves you too and cares when you suffer. He sent Jesus to save you from slavery to sin and give you a home in heaven. Do you love God?

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, . . . for I know their sorrows” (Exodus 3:7).

God had made a covenant with Abraham and with all who would become a part of his family. In Genesis 16:13-16, however, God foretold the Israelites’ affliction in Egypt. His explanation makes it clear that the Egyptians’ enslavement of God’s people was not an event that surprised Him or that He wished He could change. In other words, the Israelites’ suffering was a part of God’s plan. He did not choose to protect His people from pain and difficulties.

That being said, there is no hint in Scripture that God’s love was lacking. He deeply cared about His people. Their sorrow was His sorrow: “I know their sorrows.”

It was because of His love that He chose to deliver them. Furthermore, love was the reason God was willing to put Israel in such a difficult spot. It caused them to look to Him and cry out for Him as nothing else could have done.

God’s love is multifaceted. We can experience His love both in our pain and in our deliverance.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Pick a Fix: 1. sheep; 2. bush; 3. shoes; 4. adopted; 5. palaces; 6. slaves; 7. cries; 8. rescue.



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Jesus taught that we should love our enemies.

Showing Love to Enemies

LESSON TEXT: Luke 6:27-36;
22:47-51

GOLDEN TEXT—“**But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Luke 6:27).**

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 6:27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for

sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

22:47 And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.

48 But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

49 When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

50 And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.

51 And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to encourage students to see difficult people and situations from God's perspective.

Children at the junior level are beginning to form their own moral framework based on what they hear and see around them. At the center of their immature personal moral system is often a strong belief in "fairness," or at least in what they perceive as fairness. This lesson, therefore, may be a difficult one for them to understand and accept. You may even need to spend extra time helping them recognize that Jesus' teaching is truly right and good.

It may be useful for you in your preparation to review Scripture passages that clearly show the monumental difference between viewing things from an earthly perspective and thinking in terms of spiritual realities. One such passage is II Corinthians 4:17-18, which reminds us, among other things, that the earthly things we can see are temporary; we must focus on what is unseen and eternal. Other helpful

Scriptures are I Corinthians 13:12, II Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:1, and I John 2:16-17.

If your students attempt to understand today's teaching merely from a natural, earthly orientation, they likely will not be ready to accept it. Give them a heavenly perspective, however, and it should begin to make sense.

It is also helpful to remember how many things in the Christian life seem paradoxical and backward. The New Testament teaches us that we must die to ourselves to truly live, that it is the meek and lowly who are genuinely great, and that we have the most strength when we feel the most helpless.

It may seem like a difficult task to get juniors to grasp the seemingly illogical thoughts contained in our lesson this week. On the other hand, is this not the best time to help them begin seeing things from God's perspective? Be bold, and do not underestimate the power of God's Spirit to enlighten their minds.

TEACHING THE LESSON

It is sometimes easy for Christians to begin thinking that following Jesus is always peaceful and full of joy. The teaching of Jesus we will study today shows us that it actually can be very hard to obey Him and do what is right.

DO GOOD TO BAD PEOPLE— Luke 6:27-30

Sometimes Jesus' teaching seemed quite strange. When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," it is likely that many people thought this was a crazy idea.

Most people hate their enemies; why would anyone love them?

Obviously Jesus is not telling people to do what comes naturally. If a bully calls you names and roughs you up, your first thought is not going to be to ask God to bless him or her. But that is what Jesus said we should do!

Jesus went even beyond that. He said if someone hits you in the face, you should not stop him from doing it again! Do you see what I mean when I say that sometimes Jesus' teaching

seems a bit strange?

There is another difficult thing Jesus said we should do. He said if someone asks you for something, you should give it to him. We are not even to lend it to the person. We should just give it away and not ask for it back!

WHY YOU SHOULD DO GOOD TO BAD PEOPLE—Luke 6:31-36

As strange as these teachings sound, they actually have very logical reasoning behind them. It is important for us to think through Jesus' explanations.

First, Jesus states that He is simply encouraging us to treat others the way we would want to be treated. Surely we want others to treat *us* well; so it is logical for us to treat *others* well—even enemies.

Think about it. If you care only about people who care about you, that is not special at all. Even wicked people do that. And if you are good only to people who are good to you, God will not reward you as if you have done something great.

On the other hand, if you give to people without asking for your stuff back and you show God's love to people who hate you, then you have done something that God notices. And why do you think God notices that? Because that is what He Himself does (cf. Rom. 5:8-10). That is why we should be merciful—because God our Father is merciful.

JESUS DID GOOD TO BAD PEOPLE—Luke 22:47-51

Do you want to hear a story about Jesus doing what He taught? This happened the night the soldiers arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the confusion of the moment, the Apostle Peter ended up cutting off one of the soldier's ears. Although this man was there to do Jesus wrong, Jesus did something very kind to him. Our

Lord picked up the man's ear, put it back in its place, and immediately healed him!

Following Jesus is not for weak people. It is often very hard to be kind to those who want to hurt us. But we know Jesus did exactly what He taught. Ask God to give you the strength to follow Jesus' example.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you” (Luke 6:27).

What does it mean to love your enemy? How can you love an enemy? Enemies by their very nature are to a strong degree unlovable. Is it possible to replace our disgust with love?

We may not be able to, but God can do what we cannot. He will not cause us to love the person's sinful actions or ungodly traits; but He will help us to see beyond those things and consider our enemy's eternal soul.

Loving our enemy does not mean we feel all warm and fuzzy inside when we think of that person. When God puts His love in our hearts for our enemy, though, we will seek to do good to that person. We will do what is best for his or her soul.

Remember, God loved us when we were His enemies. He wants us to do the same for others because He wants us to love people the way He does.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Long-Ago Foes: 1. Moses—Pharaoh; 2. David—Saul; 3. Jesus—Jewish leaders; 4. Elijah—Ahab and Jezebel; 5. Paul—Jewish leaders; 6. Esther—Haman; 7. Samson—Philistines; A. I Samuel, David; B. Exodus, Moses, C. Luke, Jesus.



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Jesus taught that we should love and do good to everyone.

A Loving Stranger

LESSON TEXT: Luke 10:25-37

GOLDEN TEXT—“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:33).

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to encourage students to have the same kind of care and concern for those who are hurting that God has.

The parable of the Good Samaritan that we will study today has been repeated so many times that one would think it would lose its appeal. But the simple truth that it teaches never gets old. It teaches us on several levels not only about philanthropy and basic kindness but also about God's all-embracing love and compassion.

Some of the background information related to this story can significantly enhance the students' understanding of the story and may even help to give you fresh insights. First, the question from the lawyer, as much as it is a valid question, was probably meant as a way of boosting the man's ego. If he was able to converse with the great Teacher on such an important point, he would have gained honor in the eyes of those who listened. When Jesus turned the question back on him

and asked who was the true neighbor, he was forced to identify with a hated (albeit good) Samaritan. In this way Jesus emphasized that earthly honor has little to do with fulfilling God's law.

Second, keep in mind that the animosity between Jews and Samaritans spanned a period of nearly five hundred years. The Jews' initial frustration with Samaritans appears to have begun with Sanballat and Tobiah, who opposed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 4). The Jews in Jesus' day had such a low opinion of Samaritans that they used the name as an insult (John 8:48).

Finally, the mountainous terrain that the lonely road from Jerusalem to Jericho passes through was treacherous. Not only were there steep drop-offs above narrow canyons, but also the frequent hiding places among the rocks provided perfect cover for highwaymen. There were so many incidents of assault and thievery that it actually came to be known as "the Bloody Way."

TEACHING THE LESSON

How do you feel when a new person joins your class? Are you concerned about how *you* feel or how *that person* feels? Today we will hear a story Jesus told about a kind stranger.

THE LAW AND LIFE—Luke 10:25-28

On one occasion, a man who was an expert in Moses' Law asked Jesus to explain how a person can be sure he will live forever in heaven. Jesus turned the question back on the man: "What does Moses' Law say about this?"

The man answered by quoting the

part of the law that commands people to love God with their whole being and to love their neighbors the same as they love themselves. Jesus was happy with that answer. But the man tried to take his question a step further. He asked, "And who is my neighbor?" That is when Jesus told this story.

WHO CARED?—Luke 10:29-35

Jesus said that a Jewish man began a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road he took winds through

rugged mountains and was a favorite area for robbers to hide.

As the man made his way along the road, he was attacked by robbers. They stole his valuables, cruelly beat him, and left him for dead. Without help, the man certainly would die.

The people listening to Jesus' story were probably relieved when He said that a priest came walking by and noticed the hurt and bleeding man. Priests were important men who worked in God's temple in Jerusalem. Who better to show kindness to the helpless man?

The shocking thing, though, is that the priest not only did not offer help, but he also moved to the other side of the road. He did not even want to look at the victim.

Someone else came along, though. This was a Levite—someone who also helped in the work at the temple. But with a cold heart, he too moved to the opposite side of the road.

Next, there came a Samaritan. The Jews and Samaritans had not liked one another for hundreds of years. It would have been odd for him to offer help. But he actually was the one who took pity on the dying man! Not only did he care for the man's wounds, he put the man on his donkey and brought him to an inn as well. When he left the next day, he gave the innkeeper money and told him to care for the man while he was gone. When he returned, he would pay for anything else that was needed.

What a surprise! The Samaritan, who had the best excuse for not helping, actually helped far more than anyone would have expected.

BE ONE WHO CARES— Luke 10:36-37

When Jesus was done telling the story, He used it to get the man to think. Jesus asked, "Which of the three men who came by was a neighbor to the injured man?"

The lawyer got Jesus' point loud and clear, answering, "The one who cared for the man."

But Jesus was not done. He said to the lawyer, "Go and be like the man who cared."

Do you care about others? Jesus showed that caring for others is almost as important as loving God Himself. In fact, you cannot truly love God and not love the people around you. How will you love others today?

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33).

Jesus' masterful story offers a few surprises. One would expect the priest and the Levite to show kindness to the wounded man. After all, if the law, which these men knew, demanded that a person help a neighbor's ox or donkey that had fallen (Deut. 22:4), surely God meant for one to help the neighbor himself when he had fallen and was hurting.

Second, since Samaritans were greatly despised by devout Jews, it probably disgusted many in the crowd that the Samaritan was the hero in Jesus' story. Obviously, Jesus' point was that genuine love and compassion were far better than religious observance. Jesus' teaching always seemed to run counter to common thinking; that is because it was based on heavenly rather than earthly values.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Muse and Choose: 1. live forever; 2. with our whole being; 3. Jericho; 4. left for dead; 5. crossed to the other side of the road; 6. care for the man's wounds; 7. cared about; 8. loving people.



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The Bible teaches that God corrects us like an earthly parent would, in order to make us more like Him.

God's Loving Correction

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews
12:1-13

GOLDEN TEXT—"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:7).

Scripture Lesson Text

HEB. 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with

you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to help the students see the value of enduring hardships in the life of faith and to appreciate God's loving discipline.

A child can sometimes become embittered by a parent's discipline. Although the parent means well and is hoping to correct the child's bad behavior, often the only thing the child understands is the pain he is experiencing. The parent's goal is to help the child see beyond the pain to the benefit.

The situation was similar for the ancient Israelites. The lack of water and food in the wilderness was part of God's training and discipline for the people, but they seemed to always focus on the pain and suffering. They should have eventually realized that each hardship, rather than being just meaningless suffering, was a platform for God to show His miraculous provision for them.

It is a valuable lesson for junior children to grasp in these formative years that pain and difficulties can have a positive effect in their lives. Our lesson for this week focuses on two parts of

this important reality. First, our faith is strengthened as we forge ahead in God's strength. Great encouragement to persevere can be received from looking to Bible heroes who overcame major difficulties and gained eternal victory through faith.

Second, God builds our character by disciplining us. His discipline comes in the form of trials, troubles, and ungodly opposition. By facing these things with God's grace, we become more like Christ.

The mission for our lesson this week is to help the children see the value of the problems they encounter in everyday life. Since nothing happens by chance but only by the will of our Heavenly Father, we can be certain that whatever we run into comes from His loving hand. And since we can rely on His great power and strength, we can be sure that He can sustain us through any trouble.

If your students can grasp this one vital concept, it will serve them well the rest of their lives. Thank the Lord for this opportunity to bless them with such a wonderful truth.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Imagine you are going to run a cross-country race through the wilderness. You will not want to take your rock collection or a five-gallon water bottle. You need to stay light.

The same is true in our spiritual race—we should not let things weigh us down. These weights might be bad habits or hidden sins. God helps us shed these things that make it hard to obey and please Him.

THOSE WHO RACED BEFORE US— Heb. 12:1-3

The author of Hebrews compared a believer's life of faith to a race. He had just finished describing other people of faith who had already finished their race (chap. 11)—people such as Abraham, Moses, and Gideon. He imagined these and many other faithful people crowded around the finish line watching us run the race. And as we run, we are looking at

Jesus, the One who both created the race of faith and ran the race Himself.

What an encouragement we can receive from the others whose lives of faith are shining examples of trusting God! But Jesus is our best example. Think about how much He put up with from evil people during His ministry. But even up to the day He was crucified, He kept His focus on the joy that awaited Him with His Father. That is how we should run our race of faith.

DISCIPLINE FOR THE RACE— Heb. 12:4-10

At times, we might think living the life of faith is hard. But as Hebrews 12:4 says, we have not been beaten and bloodied as Jesus was—surely we can keep going.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to think of the hard things we have to endure in serving God as the ways He makes us better. It is just like a father who punishes his son when he does wrong. His son hurts as he disciplines him, but not because the father enjoys making him suffer. He punishes his son so that he will learn to do right.

The truth is, a father who never punishes his son when he does wrong is not a loving father. Why? Because a son who is never corrected will end up ruining his life.

God corrects us because He wants us to make good choices. Not only that, but also if God does not discipline someone, it is only because that person is not truly one of His children. That means we should be glad for God's discipline.

FOCUSING ON FINISHING— Heb. 12:11-13

God knows that we are hurting when He disciplines us. It is certainly not a fun experience. But once we have gone through the pain, we find that we are better able to run the race God has set out for us.

We should not get discouraged then

when life is hard. Remember all those who held on to their faith and stayed the course. The best thing we can do is press on, prepare ourselves to push through hardships and finish the race of faith.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:7).

There is a difference between surviving God's chastening and enduring God's chastening. The difference is found in the mind-set of the person undergoing the discipline.

Enduring chastening involves bearing the pain and persevering through the God-ordained trial, especially with dependence on God's grace and strength. The point, from God's perspective, is first for the person to learn to avoid focusing on the frightening or painful factors in the trial (cf. Matt. 14:30). The next and more important lesson is learning to focus attention and trust on the One who can calm any storm.

For those who endure divine chastening, the bond of fellowship with the Saviour is strengthened. In this way, discipline is a blessing to God's children. And that is why no child of God escapes His chastening. To never experience trials and testing from God would show that a person is not a true child of God.

In life, it is often our greatest hardships that mold us into more obedient servants of God. It could be compared with iron being smelt in a blast furnace, a process in which the useful alloys are separated from the unneeded raw materials. The same can be said of one's spiritual refinement.



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Jesus fed a crowd of four thousand people from only seven loaves of bread and a few fish.

Caring for the Crowds

LESSON TEXT: Matthew
15:29-39

GOLDEN TEXT—“I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting” (Matthew 15:32).

Scripture Lesson Text

MATT. 15:29 And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.

30 And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them:

31 Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Is'ra-el.

32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

33 And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?

34 And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

35 And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.

36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

37 And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.

38 And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.

39 And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to show Jesus' compassion for people's needs.

Almost from the moment we are born, we begin thinking about ourselves. At first we want our mothers to feed us or hold us, and we scream and cry if we do not get what we want. As we get older, we tend to have more refined desires, and although we know better than to kick and scream at that point, we might get rather crabby if we do not get what we want.

In a way, compassion is the opposite of selfishness. It often does not come easy. When we see the long, exhausting

days of teaching and healing that Jesus put in, we can better understand His un-failing compassion for people in need. Encourage your class to think of ways they can show compassion to people around them. You may even want to do something together to help people in need. Local senior centers, nursing homes, food banks, and homeless shelters are just a few places where many in your community may be in need of help.

Be sure to emphasize God's great compassion that moved Him to show mercy to us as sinners. He extends His compassion to even His enemies—there is no one too deep in sin or too rebellious.

TEACHING THE LESSON

I like to go backpacking. One time I got a late start and hiked a long way without stopping to eat so that I could get to my campsite before dark. Without food to give me energy, I ended up with a serious problem: I began shaking violently and could barely stand up. Not being able to eat can do funny (as in *bad*) things to your body. In our story today, you will see what Jesus did for people who were getting desperate for food.

HEALING NEEDED—Matt. 15:29-31

Jesus had walked a long way to a wilderness area near the Sea of Galilee. There were no towns nearby. This is where Jesus chose to carry on His ministry to the many needy people in Israel. He climbed up a high hill, and there many disabled, injured, and crippled people were brought to Him.

There was not one health issue pre-

sented to Jesus that was too hard for Him to heal. There were those who were blind, others who could not speak, some who were crippled, and people who had been severely hurt in some way. After receiving Jesus' healing touch, every one was able to walk away healed—the blind could see, the crippled could walk, and every other health problem was taken away.

Imagine if you had been there—seeing a crippled person stand up and walk for the first time. You would have done the same thing the crowds around Jesus did—they praised God! The people were completely amazed!

FOOD NEEDED—Matt. 15:32-33

The crowds were so enthralled with Jesus' healing miracles that they did not want to leave. They wanted to see what astonishing thing He would do next. The problem was that they had

been camping out in the wilderness for three days but had not prepared to be there that long. Their food had run out—and there were no fast-food restaurants in those days.

Jesus knew that the people had not had anything to eat. He also knew that they might very well become overwhelmed by exhaustion if they tried to walk miles to the nearest towns. You might think that they should have just forced themselves to get there somehow. But Jesus felt sorry for them.

He called His disciples together and told them that He was not willing to let the people suffer in this way. But their reply was, What could we possibly do to help?

In hindsight, it may seem odd to us that the disciples did not consider a miracle involving the multiplying of food, but we need to keep in mind that the focus of the people up until this point had been on Jesus' healing miracles.

NOTHING MORE NEEDED— Matt. 15:34-39

Jesus knew what He was going to do. When the disciples told Him that they had only seven pieces of bread and a few little fish with them, Jesus immediately told the people to sit down. He took the little bit of food they had, began to break it apart, and gave the pieces to the disciples. Somehow, the more food Jesus broke, the more food miraculously appeared.

They put the broken bread and fish in baskets and took them around to all the people. Four thousand men along with many women and children ate that day. Not only did the people get enough to eat, but when they could eat no more, there were still seven baskets full of food left over.

Jesus showed how much He cared. He did not want the people to suffer and faint from hunger. As God in human flesh, Jesus shows what God is like

through His actions. And He cares about your problems. Ask for His help today.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting” (Matthew 15:32).

There are several social experiments that can be found on the Internet showing the difference in how someone is treated depending the way she is dressed. In some tests, a child—usually a girl—dresses up in nice clothes and stands in a crowded public place. Many people stop to talk with the girl and try to help her find her parents.

Then the girl is given ragged clothes, leaves her hair messy, and stands in the same place. Almost no one stops to help her. People generally try to avoid her.

Compassion is caring and trying to help when you find someone who is in need. You can have compassion for big things, such as helping someone who is badly hurt, or little things, such as opening the door for an elderly person. Jesus had compassion for the crowds who were hungry and getting weak.

We should take the time to show compassion for those around us because we have been blessed by God's compassion for us. Compassion is an important mark of a genuine Christian. Think of someone in your life whom you may be able to help or encourage this week.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Across: 4. fish; 6. Galilee; 7. blind; 9. wilderness; 10. leftover. Down: 1. amazed; 2. crippled; 3. miracles; 5. heal; 7. bread; 8. hungry.



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Jesus healed many people, and cast demons out of many others.

Jesus' Care for the Sick

LESSON TEXT: Mark 1:29-34,
40-45

GOLDEN TEXT—“And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (Mark 1:41).

Scripture Lesson Text

MARK 1:29 And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

30 But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.

31 And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

32 And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

33 And all the city was gathered together at the door.

34 And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and

saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;

44 And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

45 But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to highlight the great compassion and love of Jesus during His early ministry.

When we read a story in the Gospels like the one today, it can make one wonder whether the percentage of sick, disabled, and maimed in Galilee's population was significantly higher than it is in our own. It seemed everywhere He went, there were multitudes in real need of healing.

Logically speaking, there probably were more per capita who were suffering from various ailments. Knowledgeable doctors (even for their time) were rarely available, and any trained medical help people might receive would likely be too expensive for the poor. As a result, disease tended to run rampant, and injuries were often life-threatening. Also, the general concern and care for the sick that we take for

granted in today's health-care saturated society was not known at that time.

It was actually Jesus' example of compassion for the sick that led to the establishment of hospital-like institutions. Healing centers existed in conjunction with various other religions, but it was Christianity that created an organized and successful model of medical care about three hundred years after Christ's ministry.

Consider the deplorable condition of lepers in ancient times. These people were driven from society and rarely if ever experienced the warmth and care of anyone other than fellow lepers. For Jesus to reach out with great compassion and touch the desperate leprosy man must have been emotionally overwhelming for him. The man, rather than being a lonely outcast, could now be fully accepted back into society.

TEACHING THE LESSON

My daughter once won a drawing contest in our small town and got to meet the mayor. This man started out as a little-known person in our state, but within a few years he was elected a representative in the United States Congress. Now he is getting ready to run for governor of our state.

Not many people knew of Jesus when He began His ministry, but He quickly became famous. When He cast an evil spirit out of a man in Capernaum, people learned of it far and wide.

JESUS' CARE FOR PETER'S MOTHER-IN-LAW—Mark 1:29-31

After Jesus helped the demon-possessed man, He came to Simon Pe-

ter's home in the town of Capernaum. It just so happened that Simon's mother was sick with a fever, and it was not long before someone mentioned this to Jesus. Jesus had not done many miracles yet, but it seems clear that some people there were hoping He would work a miracle for the suffering woman.

If that is true, they were not disappointed. Jesus came to the woman, took her by the hand, and helped her up. As He did, the fever immediately left her. Jesus' miraculous power gave the woman health and strength, so much so that she began serving Jesus and others in the home.

JESUS' CARE FOR THE CROWDS—Mark 1:32-34

Jesus' miracle-working power was becoming known throughout the city and far beyond. It is no surprise then that many people who had health problems and disabilities were inspired with hope that Jesus might possibly heal them. And so as the sun was setting, people came from every direction and crowded around the door of Peter's house. In fact, the whole city turned out to see if Jesus would be willing to help the many calling out for His attention.

Jesus had already had a long day. He probably wished He could just go lie down and rest. Instead, He helped the crowd of ailing and hurting people. Not only did He heal those with diseases and disabilities, but He also cast out many demons. Some of these evil spirits wanted to spoil Jesus' reputation, knowing that He was God's only Son. Rather than let demons proclaim who He was, though, He ordered them not to speak.

JESUS' CARE FOR A LEPER—Mark 1:40-45

Jesus went on to preach and heal in many other places in Galilee. But the book of Mark singles out one noteworthy case.

A man with leprosy approached Jesus. This was unusual because lepers were not allowed to come near healthy people for fear of infection. This man, however, kneeled down and pleaded with Jesus: "If you want to, you can heal me of leprosy."

Jesus felt great compassion for the suffering man and replied, "I will." Then He reached out and touched the man and healed him instantly.

Then Jesus commanded the man to go show himself to a priest, which is exactly what Moses' Law commanded when someone was cured from leprosy. The man was so excited, though, that he could not contain himself. He went all over the area telling everyone

he met about Jesus' miracle. As a result, so many people came to see Jesus that He was surrounded by crowds wherever He went.

Jesus' compassionate love was big enough to care for anyone who came to Him. Let us also show compassion toward those around us.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

"And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean" (Mark 1:41).

What moves you to compassion? To begin to care about another human being? Certainly to look at a diseased, deformed, ragged, desperate man, it is easy to see why Jesus was moved. But to feel compassion is one thing; to humbly and effectively help someone when it requires doing something uncomfortable or even loathsome can be altogether a different matter.

If you have ever seen pictures of leprous people whose faces and bodies are deformed, contorted, and covered with grotesque lesions, you might be able to imagine how awkward and uncomfortable it might have been for Jesus to reach out and touch the leper. And yet the compassion Jesus felt overcame any reluctance.

It is healthy for our souls to allow our own compassion to overcome our fears in order to help someone in need. Who knows? It might even result in the needy person being made spiritually whole by the same Jesus who healed the leper. Let us always help those in need so "that they may see [our] good works, and glorify [our] Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).



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Jesus told the widow of Nain not to weep and raised her son back to life.

Jesus' Loving Ways

LESSON TEXT: Luke 7:11-22

GOLDEN TEXT—“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not” (Luke 7:13).

Scripture Lesson Text

LUKE 7:11 And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

12 Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14 And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15 And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16 And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.

17 And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.

18 And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things.

19 And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

20 When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?

21 And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight.

22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to remind the students that Jesus' love and compassion were an essential part of His messianic work.

The miracles and teaching of Jesus had drawn attention from people all over Israel. Their excitement often rose to a fever pitch as they considered the implications of what was happening. Both John and Jesus had been proclaiming, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The people knew the prophecies that when the Messiah came, His kingdom would grow to fill the whole earth (cf. Dan. 2:44). They longed for that time and wondered whether they might see these events in their own lifetimes.

The incredible power Jesus possessed was the kind of awesome power they expected to bring about the global conquest they were hoping for.

What they did not seem to notice was that Jesus' miraculous powers were guided by His love and compassion. He never performed displays of His power to destroy His many ene-

mies. No bolts of lightning struck blasphemers; no lasers shooting from His eyes battled those who desired His death. His power was used only to bring healing and wholeness, joy and life.

In this week's lesson, we find Jesus performing what many might have classified as the most amazing miracle of all: bringing a dead person back to life. And yet He did not do it to show off; it was because He saw the deep grief of a widow who had lost her only son. Compassion was what drove Jesus' mighty works.

Although John apparently expected his Messiah to be more forceful in advancing the kingdom agenda, Jesus reminded him of the subtle but irresistible power of love. The miracles He was doing showed the kind of kingdom Jesus intended to establish.

May God bless you with the ability to emphasize this reality as you teach: Jesus' love and compassion for hurting people are real. When we seek His healing and help, we experience not only His power but also His love.

TEACHING THE LESSON

When I was young, I enjoyed doing tricks—making coins disappear and turning pieces of paper into dollar bills. What I enjoyed most was when people's eyes got big and they would say, "Whoa! How'd you do that?"

People were far more amazed, though, when Jesus did miracles. Thankfully, they were not just clever tricks. The people realized that Jesus had amazing powers, and this was especially true in today's story.

SORROWFUL MOTHER— Luke 7:11-12

Jesus was making His way to a town called Nain. There was a large crowd of people traveling with Him. As they neared the city gate, a funeral procession was coming out carrying the body of a young man.

Funerals in those days were very loud, as people wailed and cried in sorrow over their loss (see Mark 5:38-39). This funeral, however, was especially

sad, because not only was the young man who died his mother's only son, but her husband also had died earlier.

LOVING LORD—Luke 7:13-18

When Jesus saw the grieving woman, He was moved by her great sorrow. He spoke comforting words to the poor woman and encouraged her to stop crying.

While other people could have offered only comforting words, Jesus was able to do much more. He went over and touched the pallet that the young man was being carried on. At that point the funeral procession came to a stop, and everyone watched to see what Jesus would do.

Jesus then spoke to the one lying dead: "Young man, I say to you, get up!" Imagine if you had been there. What would you have thought if you saw someone telling a dead person to do something? You might think it was kind of crazy. But for Jesus, it was different—His words have power!

As soon as Jesus spoke, the dead person sat up and began talking! Jesus then brought the very-alive son to his astonished but joyful mother.

When the crowd had a moment to realize that what they had just seen was real, they glorified God. They knew that God had sent a man of amazing miraculous powers among them.

Word spread like wildfire—Jesus had brought a dead person back to life! It was not long before all of Judea and the surrounding areas had heard what Jesus had done.

ABSOLUTE PROOF—Luke 7:19-22

You might remember that we learned a little about John the Baptist in lesson 3. Now John was a full-grown man and had been proclaiming the coming of Israel's Messiah. He had been shown by God that Jesus was God's chosen One. But possibly John was hoping the Messiah would have an army and conquer the world. Since Jesus was not

doing that, he sent two messengers to Jesus to ask Him if He truly was the One the prophets had foretold.

Jesus' answer was His deeds. At the very time the messengers came, Jesus was healing, casting out demons, and doing wonderful miracles. In fact, He had just raised someone from the dead! What more could be said?

Jesus told John's messengers, "Tell John everything you have seen Me do here." Then He added, "Blessed is everyone who does not stumble in his faith in Me."

John seems to have been looking for Jesus to use His power as a weapon to conquer; instead, it was love that guided Jesus' miracle working power. This was proof that Jesus was truly the Messiah. Are you trusting in Him?

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

"When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not" (Luke 7:13).

What a tragic situation—a woman who had already lost her husband had now lost her only son! Beyond the incredible grief this would inevitably cause, in those days, it also likely meant that she would be plunged into extreme poverty. Without someone to provide for her, the future looked bleak indeed.

Jesus knew the turmoil in the woman's heart, and His love compelled Him to act. When Jesus tells us we do not need to weep, we can be sure that He will turn our sorrows into joy.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Super Scramble: 1. crowd, Nain; 2. funerals, wailed, cried; 3. died, mother; 4. sorrow, woman; 5. Young, get; 6. person, talking; 7. John, deeds.



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Jesus is our Great High Priest in heaven.

Our Loving High Priest

LESSON TEXT: Hebrews
4:14—5:9

GOLDEN TEXT—“We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15).

Scripture Lesson Text

HEB. 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.

6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.

APPROACHING THE LESSON

AIM: to help students understand and appreciate that Jesus, their loving Saviour, represents and pleads for them before God's throne in heaven.

The concept taught in this week's passage is one that may need extra explanation, especially for children who are not familiar with Israel's sacrificial system. When children understand that we can pray to God anytime, anywhere, it may come as a surprise that we need Jesus to be our Advocate, or Representative, before God.

We learn much from the Old Testament sacrificial system. Certainly one reason God instituted it was to help us understand the spiritual realities behind the rituals and rules. They were an "example and shadow of heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). Indeed, without the illustration of an innocent lamb being slain for a person's sin, it would be much less likely that people would understand the reason Jesus had to die.

The function of the high priest is another important picture of a spiritual reality. As sinners and enemies of God, we had no right to ask God for help or

forgiveness. We must have a go-between, an advocate. Jesus fulfills this role and advocates on our behalf. Since we were in need of a sacrifice for our sins before we could have any connection with God, we recognize that Jesus is also our sacrifice. Thus Jesus is both our High Priest and the sacrifice that the High Priest must bring before God on our behalf.

The most important emphasis in our lesson, however, is the love and compassion that our eternal High Priest has for us. Surely as God, He would be no less loving if He had not taken on a fleshly body. On the other hand, by becoming man, He certainly could better appreciate the difficulties and suffering that are a part of every believer's life journey. We benefit greatly by having a heavenly representative who has also been where we are and experienced the same kinds of struggles.

Jesus' compassion toward the infirm that we have seen in this unit of study is now directed toward us. Though we are plagued by sin and weak in our flesh, Jesus loves us deeply.

TEACHING THE LESSON

The brilliant scientist Albert Einstein once happily helped a fifth-grade girl named Emmy understand her math homework. Maybe he was just being nice, but it is possible that her struggles reminded him of his own. He once took a test hoping to enter a famous university. Although he did very well in math and science, he got a failing grade in the other subjects.

Often a person feels sympathy for a

person who is having the same problems he has had. Jesus is no exception.

OUR HIGH PRIEST IN HEAVEN— Heb. 4:14-16

A high priest in Israel was a man who offered sacrifices to God in the temple on behalf of the people. Jesus is our High Priest, but He represents us before God the Father in the heavenly temple. Jesus is the best representative we

could possibly have. First, He became our sacrifice for sins, but He also cares deeply about what troubles us.

Because Jesus is our High Priest, we can boldly ask the Ruler of the Universe to help us when we are in trouble. What an amazing privilege!

HIGH PRIESTS ON EARTH—

Heb. 5:1-4

Although the high priest God chose for Israel was very important, he was just a man. He struggled with problems just like anyone else. Because of that, when he had to offer sacrifices for people's sins over and over again, he should have been understanding.

He had to admit he was also a sinner. That is why he had to offer sacrifices to cover his own sins before he could offer sacrifices for the sins of others.

OUR HIGH PRIEST FOREVER—

Heb. 5:5-9

Just as earthly high priests were chosen by God, so was our heavenly High Priest. Jesus Christ was chosen by God the Father to represent us before Him. He is our High Priest forever!

Why did Jesus get such an eternal honor? One reason is that He is perfectly qualified. He is both God and man. As a man, He was able to die. When the time came, Jesus was in deep distress; in the Garden of Gethsemane He cried out to His Father to rescue Him from the grip of death. And His prayers were heard.

Although Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, that did not keep Him from suffering on earth. In fact, He had to learn to deny His own fleshly needs in order to obey God—the same thing we have to do! Because He passed every test perfectly, He is perfectly qualified to be our High Priest in heaven. Thank God that Jesus not only represents you before God, but He also knows firsthand what suffering is and cares for you when you suffer.

TALKING ABOUT THE GOLDEN TEXT

“We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15).

In America, citizens have representatives in the government who are supposed to give voice to their concerns and defend their specific interests. Although there are faithful representatives, it is not uncommon for average citizens to feel that their representative does not even understand their beliefs and concerns, let alone care.

A high priest of Israel, while not elected by them, represented the people before God and offered sacrifices for their sins. This did not, however, guarantee that the high priest had any real concern for those he represented. As important as these religious leaders were, they often did not know or understand the struggles of the people, and some truly did not care. We know both from Scripture and the writings of Josephus that some first-century high priests were cruel and even downright wicked. Can you imagine a penitent sinner before God depending on such a person to represent him before his holy and just God?

Thankfully, God has provided us with a perfect heavenly high priest. Not only has Jesus faced the same kind of struggles that we do, but He is also sympathetic toward us. Because He once lived on earth as a man, He remembers that in our flesh, we are weak and frail.

What a blessing it is to be represented before God by someone who understands us and cares for us! May it always give us boldness to come before God's throne in prayer.

ACTIVITY ANSWERS

Hidden message: Jesus is our High Priest.



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