Ages 16 - 18

Missionary Baptist

Vacation Bible School Literature

"There Is No New Thing Under the Sun"

Ecc. 1:9

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"No New Thing Under The Sun"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Ages 16–18

Written by Brother Mitchell Glasscock and Sister Bobette Pruitt

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INTRODUCTION TO THEME AND LESSONS:

The theme chosen for this series of Bible study lessons is "...there is no new thing under the sun", taken from Ecclesiastes 1:9, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

As the committee discussed possibilities for a theme and lesson topics, the suggestion was made to use Bible characters as examples (either positive or negative) to use in our daily lives and the situations we face. In the discussion it was noted that we face the same kinds of situations as those of Bible times, and that we can learn from their actions and how God dealt with them. As this was discussed, the verse from Ecclesiastes was remembered and chosen for our theme.

After being led to the theme and realizing there is not really anything new that we face, possible topics for lessons were discussed. We spend much of our lives searching for happiness and satisfaction. Along the journey of life we face many temptations and often make difficult choices. We also encounter difficulties in our lives; ridicule and deceit are two primary examples. But, God's love is the enduring thing and the sure hope on which we must depend without fail. He provided the plan of salvation for the lost to be reconciled to Him.

At the end of each lesson some additional study references are listed and a song or songs that relate to the lesson topic. Your class could choose some of these songs to sing as part of the class or for Bible school commencement.

It is the hope of each writer that you will be provided with some lasting examples, challenging thoughts, and spiritual encouragement that will help you in your daily life and walk with God.

LESSON ONE

SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION

LESSON TEXT
ECCLESIASTES 2:1-15

1. I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.
2. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?
3. I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.
4. I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:
5. I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits:
6. I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:
7. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:
8. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.
9. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.
10. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor: and this was my portion of all my labor.
11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.
12. And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? Even that which hath been already done.
13. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.
14. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.
15. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity.

INTRODUCTION

When was the last time you met someone who was satisfied or content with his life? Unfortunately, it seems there are few people in the world who are at peace with their lives. We see it everywhere, even in ourselves: people desiring and wanting more in life. Do not misunderstand; it is healthy to set goals and to work to achieve them, but too many times we find that our desires rest solely on obtaining worldly possessions. Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Where is your heart? Does it rest upon obtaining worldly treasures or on spiritual treasures?

continued

As we study our lesson on satisfaction, let's look at two Bible characters to see where their search takes them, and let's learn from their living examples.

KING SOLOMON

The author of our lesson text is the great Biblical character King Solomon. He was the king of Israel and Judah and is known for his great wisdom, wealth, and power. As a young king, Solomon dedicated himself to the service of God. In I Kings 3:9-14, Solomon asked for a discerning (or clear-sighted) heart so that he could hear and respond with obedience to God and His word. This is a wonderful request and should be one that all of God's children should strive for. God, being pleased with Solomon's request, granted him a discerning heart, as well as additional blessings he did not ask for: wealth and power. In studying Solomon's life (throughout the book of I Kings), however, we find that his discerning heart became divided as he let his wealth and the religion of his foreign wives influence him and turn him away from God. We find that in all of Solomon's grandeur, no amount of wisdom or wealth can replace a heart directed toward, and faithful to, God. As we read in our lesson text, Solomon sought after all the worldly things and, in the end, found them to be vanity (or worthless).

THE PRODIGAL SON

I am sure everyone is familiar with the story of the Prodigal Son. In Luke 15, Jesus tells us about a man who had two sons. The younger son asked his father to give him his share of the estate. When the young man gathered all his belongings, he went to a distant country and squandered all his wealth by living wildly. After the son became penniless and the country had fallen into a famine, the only thing he could do to obtain money was feed pigs. Jesus says that when the young son came to his senses, he started back toward his home to beg his father's forgiveness and to ask if he could work for his father as a servant. The parable ends with the father having compassion on his son and accepting his request for forgiveness.

This parable has such a great lesson to be learned from Jesus on the search for satisfaction. Here Jesus shows us that seeking pleasures and excess can ultimately lead to spiritual poverty. Remember the scripture referenced above: "where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Here we see the young son's heart was set upon worldly things and good times. This, however, perished as all worldly things do. But, as Jesus teaches that in returning to God for restoration of our spiritual desires, we will find divine compassion and mercy and can obtain the riches of God's grace.

CONCLUSION

What do you seek in your search for satisfaction? Take this time to read what Jesus says in Luke 12:22-31. In our search for satisfaction in life, I hope that we have seen from our lesson that true contentment, happiness, and inner peace comes through first obtaining a personal experience with God (salvation), which then enables us to walk with God and seek His will in our lives. A verse from our upcoming lesson "Dealing with Ridicule and Deceit" sums it up well...2 Corinthians 4:18 "While we look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

STUDY REFERENCES

Isaiah 55:1-4; Luke 12:15-21; Psalms 128:1-6; John 4:1-15

SONG

"Mansions Over the Hilltop" by Ira Stamphill. This song can be found in the hymnal Best Loved Songs and Hymns.

LESSON TWO

TEMPTATIONS AND CHOICES

LESSON TEXT
GENESIS 39:7-21 & JOSHUA 7:20-25

Gen 39:7-21

7. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.
8. But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;
9. There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?
10. And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her.
11. And it came to pass about this time, that Joseph went into the house to do his business; and there was none of the men of the house there within.
12. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.
13. And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,
14. That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:
15. And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.
16. And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.
17. And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:
18. And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.
19. And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spake unto him, saying, After this manner did thy servant to me; that his wrath was kindled.
20. And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.
21. But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

Josh 7:20-25

20. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus have I done:
21. When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it.
22. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it.

continued

23. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD.
24. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.
25. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

INTRODUCTION

We all have choices to make as we go through life. Life would surely be boring if all choices and decisions were made for us. As older teens, you are either beginning to, or already have, more voice and influence on the choices and decisions you make. Also, at this point in your lives things that influence your choices increase and change. As the freedom to make choices increases, many times temptation to make wrong or unwise choices increases as well. As you read, study and discuss this lesson, consider the choices you are making and those you have ahead of you. Also, as we look at some examples from the scripture, consider and discuss some of the things that can influence your choices.

MEANING AND ORIGIN

As we begin this lesson on "Temptation and Choices", let us look at the meaning, the origin, and the age of these things.

What does it mean to have a choice, and why do we have the ability to make choices? The word "choice" is a form of the word "choose" which the dictionary defines as: "To select from a number of possible alternatives; To determine or decide." God created man a free moral agent, meaning He gave us the ability to make choices. This is shown in Genesis with the first man and woman created by God – Adam and Eve. Adam had the opportunity to choose the names for the other creatures of God's creation (Gen. 2:19). Adam and Eve each had a choice to eat or not to eat of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:1-6).

What does "tempt" mean, and what is its source? The dictionary defines "tempt" as: "To try to get (someone) to do wrong, especially by a promise of reward; To be inviting or attractive to; To provoke or to risk provoking." We learn in the early chapters of Genesis that God created all things. This includes Satan (a fallen angel) who is the tempter to do evil. This, also, is shown in the lives of the first woman and man in Genesis 3 where each of them is tempted to break the law given by God.

As these examples show, temptation and choices are nothing new. They have been around since near the beginning of time, as man knows it. Numerous other examples can be found throughout the scriptures. From childhood, people of all ages have the ability to make choices and are faced with temptation. Some of the choices you make and how you handle the temptation through your teenage years and in later life will impact your life and the lives of those around you for years to come. The Lord is willing and desires to help us make the right choices and resist temptation, but we must make the choice to listen to His instruction through His Spirit and His written word. The scripture text selected for this lesson gives two examples of men who faced a temptation, made a choice, and the results of the choice made.

JOSEPH'S EXAMPLE

In the portion of the lesson text taken from Genesis, Joseph is tempted by his master's wife to commit adultery with her. However, he resists her advances and states "...how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" She continues daily to try to persuade him to participate in this sinful act. Eventually she makes it appear that Joseph

has made advances toward her, and Joseph's master, in anger, has Joseph cast into prison. But, verse 21 tells us that the Lord was with Joseph and helped him even in prison. When we continue to read in Genesis beyond the lesson text, we find that Joseph did not remain in prison but instead became a powerful ruler in Egypt. He was instrumental in preserving the lives of his father and brothers and, through them, the nation of Israel.

There are several points to consider from this example:

- Joseph resisted the temptation to sin. We should do likewise.
- Satan can be very persistent. Some temptations we may have to face often, maybe even daily.
- Joseph resisted for the right reason: "not sin against God".
- Persecution may appear to result from resisting temptation.
- Do the right thing for the right reason, and God will provide comfort and strength. Eventually, reward and blessing will follow.
- God watches over and cares for those who belong to Him and obey Him.

As we see, Joseph is a good example of one that endured temptation and hardship and chose to honor and serve God. The result was blessings for him and his family.

ACHAN'S EXAMPLE

Next we look at the temptation and choice that Achan made. Achan was tempted to take of the spoils from Jericho which the children of Israel had destroyed. Joshua had warned the people not to take any of the spoils, or it would bring a curse upon them. As the lesson text from Joshua tells, Achan chose to yield to the temptation to take a garment, some silver and some gold from the spoils. The results of his choice brought destruction not only to him, but to his family, also. And until his sin was exposed, a curse was upon the people of Israel just as God had explained if they disobeyed His instructions.

Here are some points to consider from Achan's example:

- Making a choice to yield to temptation brings trouble and destruction to our lives.
- It can also bring hurt and destruction to others.
- It can hurt things that we are a part of - family, church, community, etc.

Unlike Joseph, Achan chose to give in to his own desires rather than to honor and obey God. His actions brought hurt to his nation and destruction to himself and his family.

OTHER CHOICES

All of us make many choices and decisions daily. Certainly many of the choices we make in life do not involve temptation; however, the wise seek God's guidance in making choices and decisions which will affect their lives and the lives of others.

TEMPTATION TO DO WRONG - TEMPTATION TO AVOID DOING RIGHT

Again referring to Genesis 3:1, the scripture tells us that Satan is very subtle. He is a deceiver. Deceit is a topic in a later lesson. The devil many times uses our weaknesses to tempt us. We can be tempted to do things that are wrong such as getting drunk, stealing, or lying. If we choose to yield to this temptation, we are guilty of the sin of commission.

We can also be tempted to avoid doing something God is drawing or leading us to do, such as seek Him when lost, witness to a lost friend, or testify. When we choose to not follow His drawing Spirit or His leadership, we are guilty of the sin of omission.

continued

CONCLUSION

As pointed out in the previous lesson, we search for and pursue things that we think will bring satisfaction. Satan can make things look appealing and pleasing, but remember the two examples from the lesson text. The choice of such things might bring immediate pleasure or satisfaction but later bring harm or destruction. We should remember, as pointed out in the previous lesson, that true satisfaction comes from God and not from worldly things that perish.

We have the opportunity to learn from the experiences of those we read about in the Bible and the lives of those we observe around us. While you are young, please take advantage of this opportunity that God gives you.

STUDY REFERENCES

Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:1-11; Proverbs 1:10-16; 1 Kings 1:1-8; Proverbs 23:29-35

SONG

"Farther Along" by W. B. Stevens. This song can be found in the hymnal Heavenly Highway Hymns, Second Edition.

LESSON THREE

DEALING WITH RIDICULE AND DECEIT

LESSON TEXT
2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-18

8. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;
9. Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;
10. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.
11. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.
12. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.
13. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;
14. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.
15. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.
16. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.
17. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
18. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

INTRODUCTION

I am sure all of us are faced with a certain amount of mockery, sarcasm, scorn, and slander (ridicule), as well as fraudulent and misleading situations (deceit) in our daily lives. These are two very difficult issues to deal with. In today's lesson we will look at two examples from the Bible concerning ridicule and deceit and how God would have us handle these situations in a Christian manner.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The writings of our lesson come from the Apostle Paul who, aside from Jesus Christ himself, is considered one of the greatest teachers of Christian faith. Like Jesus, Paul was faced with and dealt with great persecution, so who better to learn from on this topic. As Paul tells us in the opening of our lesson "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken."

Paul was deceived into thinking the way of the Jews, the Pharisees in particular, was correct (see Matthew 23:23-28). He was raised believing that the Jewish law, and living strictly by it, was more important than establishing a personal relationship with God (salvation). On the road to Damascus, Paul was convicted by God, overcame the deceit, and was saved. Paul was then called to be an apostle to the Gentiles and faced persecution and rejection (ridicule) throughout his work for God.

continued

Paul preached on Mars' Hill in Athens (Acts 17:22-34) about repentance and faith to a people who "ignorantly worshiped" all sorts of gods, including one they called "the Unknown God" whom Paul declared to them. After his sermon we read in verse 32 that "when they heard ... some mocked: and others said, We will hear out thee again of this matter." Here we see, as Paul experienced, a situation where people were deceived, because they were worshipping several gods instead of the one true God. Deceit is dangerous in any form, but in its worst form it can bring eternal spiritual death.

Verse 32 also tells of the ridicule Paul faced in trying to preach the truth. He could have been easily discouraged as he departed, but verse 34 tells that certain men clave (or adhered) unto him. When we follow Paul's life as a missionary through the last half of the book of Acts, we see that he met with much ridicule and persecution. Through the hard times, however, Paul tells us of the good and happy times, despite the persecution and imprisonment. As we see through this example, God will supply the encouragement we need if we will look to and depend on Him. Paul also looked for reward beyond this life. Near the end of his life, he offered advice and encouragement to a young preacher, Timothy. "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:5-8). The work God has for us to do is not always easy, but keep the faith; there is help along the way, and the reward at the end is worth all.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE FROM THE BIBLE

Deceit begets deceit. An example of this can be found in the life of Jacob. In his young life Jacob used deception to his advantage. He used deceit to cheat his brother Esau out of his birthright (Genesis chapter 25). Later, Jacob again deceived when he and his mother tricked Isaac, Jacob's father, into bestowing the blessing due his first born, Esau, upon Jacob. The result of Jacob's actions had a huge impact on his life. Due to fear of what Esau might do to him, Jacob was driven from his home and family for many years. In studying Jacob's life, we see that in the remainder of his life Jacob was on the receiving end of deceit. When Jacob agreed to work for a man for seven years to marry one of his daughters, the man deceived Jacob by having him marry a different daughter. Later Jacob's own sons deceived Jacob by telling him that his favorite son Joseph had been killed, when in reality they had sold Joseph into slavery. God tells us that "...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7).

I am sure we all have heard the saying, "Honesty is the best policy". With the help of God, deceit can be overcome but, as we see in this example, often it brings needless pain and suffering into our lives.

THE ROAD OF LIFE

What types of trouble and persecution do you deal with today? Among peers in your school and neighborhood there may be such pressures as drugs, alcohol, and gangs. You may have been, or presently are, faced with pressures of being involved in such activities that you know and feel are not the appropriate things to do. Often refusing to be a part of such activities brings about ridicule from others. In addition, such influences as illicit music and television programs, the lack of discipline, and improper behavior in our society can leave one feeling defenseless in the battle between right and wrong. Often we are made to believe that being a part of

such actions are "cool," will make us popular, or will make us feel good. But as examples from the Bible, history and even everyday life show us, the worldly things that are made to look so good are often deceiving.

Job 14:1 tells us: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble." Though our lives may have troubles, we can persevere through such trying times by depending on God who will provide us strength to overcome. Romans 5:3-5: "...but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

CONCLUSION

The Bible, God's word, is such a great tool for us to rely on for guidance in any situation. In life we may feel we are alone and that no one understands what we are facing or going through, but as our theme reminds us "there is no new thing under the sun." Let's look at Matthew 5:11: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake."

Ridicule and deceit are two things people have had to contend with since the beginning of time; remember the Garden of Eden with Adam, Eve, and Satan. Instead of partaking in the action of ridicule and deceit or letting it weigh us down and overcome us, let's see what II Timothy 3:12 has to say for instruction: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But, evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But, continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them: And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Hebrews 12:1-3 instructs us: "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, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith..."

STUDY REFERENCES

Genesis 3:1-6; Job 2:9&10; Luke 4:5-8; Proverbs 1:10-16; 16:32; 25:28

LESSON FOUR

GOD'S LOVE

LESSON TEXT
ROMANS 5:1-11 & 8:35-39

Rom 5:1-11

1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
5. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
7. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
10. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
11. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Rom 8:35-39

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
36. As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.
38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
39. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Webster's dictionary defines "love" as "to regard with affection, to like, to delight, to be tenderly attached; endearment." Have you ever loved someone or felt loved by someone? We all know that love is a wonderful feeling that gives us a sense of belonging, security, acceptance, understanding, and hope. 1 Corinthians 13:7 & 13 tells us that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never fails...and now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

GOD'S LOVE TOWARD US

Have you ever thought about how much God loves you? God's love toward us is so great and so awesome; it is almost beyond full comprehension. But let us know this,

God loves us (you, me, and all of mankind) so much that even before the first man was created, He had set a plan in place to allow us to be with Him for eternity, despite our unworthiness. How awesome! This plan is salvation, available to everyone. God, knowing man would fall from his perfect state and be separated from Him to live in sin, gave us a way to be joined with Him for eternity, which is through salvation (we will study this topic in detail in our next lesson).

GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE

I John 3:1-2 shows the manner in which God loves us: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." How wonderful it is for those who are saved to be called "a child of God." There is no greater purpose or sense of belonging. God's great plan and love for us was manifested in the flesh through His Son Jesus Christ. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." There is no greater love than the love that God has shown toward us by sending His son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins so that all who believe by faith may have everlasting life. Our lesson text from Romans tells us that through the shedding of the perfect blood of Jesus, we are justified (shown to be excused) and that through His resurrection, we who believe and are saved by God's grace receive the atonement or are reconciled with God. God's love is shown through His faithfulness toward His people whom He protects, cares for, and saves from eternal judgement.

What is even more of a testament of God's awesome love for us is that once we believe through faith and are saved, God tells us we are never separated from Him again. Our lesson text in Romans chapter 8 tells us that "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God's salvation and promise of its everlasting presence is the deepest and most awesome demonstration of love ever known.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE

As children of God, we are to show God's love for us to those who are unsaved. The greatest gift we can give to others is the gift of love, which is given to us by God. Christian love is the greatest influence we can have on those who are unsaved. God wants us to show His love and, as Jesus commanded in John 13:34-35, "Love one another, As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." We are to be living testimonies for God so that people will see His great love.

CONCLUSION

As children of God, we should continuously praise Him for all the love He has shown in His mercy and forgiveness of our sins. Ephesians 2:4-5 explains that because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgression; it is by grace you have been saved. God's very essence is love, and He shows us this not only through His salvation, but also through daily presence in the hearts, minds, and lives of those who have faith in him and live for Him.

STUDY REFERENCES

Jeremiah 31:3; I John 4:16; Romans 8:32; John 10:10-19 & 15:13; I Peter 1:22

SONG

"The Love of God" by F.M. Lehman. One source for this song is Best Loved Songs And Hymns.

LESSON FIVE

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

LESSON TEXT
PSALM 116:1-15 & ACTS 16:25-34

Psalm 116:1-15

1. I love the LORD, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.
2. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.
3. The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.
4. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.
5. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.
6. The LORD preserveth the simple: I was brought low, and he helped me.
7. Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee.
8. For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.
9. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.
10. I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:
11. I said in my haste, All men are liars.
12. What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?
13. I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.
14. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.
15. Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.

Acts 16:25-34

25. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.
26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.
27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.
28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.
29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,
30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?
31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.
32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.
33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.
34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this lesson concerns a plan. What kind of plans do you have? Do you think about the future, or do you live for today? Have you thought about and planned, at least in your mind, things such as what you would like to do; where you would like to live; with whom you would like to spend your life; where you would like to be when you die? Are you a planner or a doer? Regardless of which you are, hopefully you understand planning.

The dictionary defines "plan" as "aim, intent, a method of making or doing something or achieving an end." On a personal level it is something we want to accomplish and the method we use to accomplish it. The plan itself can achieve nothing. Actions must be taken to complete the steps defined in a plan before the end result can be accomplished.

The greatest plan ever devised is the topic of this lesson. God is the originator and author of this plan. This is not a new plan; it has existed since before time as we know it. This plan has a divine purpose. The plan is God's plan of salvation.

WHY WAS THE PLAN REQUIRED?

Man "had it made" from the time he was created; God created man in a holy estate with complete contentment and satisfaction. He had fellowship with God. God had given man only one law: do not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Through deceit and temptation, Eve and, then Adam, chose to disobey God and break this law by eating the forbidden fruit. When Adam broke God's law, he died spiritually (was separated from God). This nature was passed on to Eve and all the descendents of Adam, including you and me.

Since God is righteous and just, atonement had to be made for the transgression of God's law. Man was guilty, with no hope. If he was to be reconciled to God, a method would have to be established in order that reconciliation could occur.

God already had a plan (Gen. 4:15). God knew all things that would happen with all of mankind before He created the world and man. He knew that man would need a way to be reconciled with Him. God had designed the plan for reconciliation before He created man. When man sinned, the plan of salvation that God had devised then needed to be revealed and implemented so that man would have a way to be reconciled with God. The plan of salvation was devised and implemented due to God's love for His creation - mankind.

THE PLAN - GOD AS MAN

The plan devised by God (who exists as three harmonious parts - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) was that a part of Him, the Son, would become a sacrifice for the sin of man. The plan was this:

When the time was right, a young virgin would be selected to conceive a child by the work of the Holy Ghost. The child would not (actually could not) have a human man as his father. God's Son, Jesus, would be born of this virgin in the manner as other children are born. He would live a human life as a common man on earth. One big difference, however, would be that even though tempted as other men, He would never sin. In the last part of this earthly life He would teach and preach about His Heavenly Father who had sent Him. This teaching would include that He, Jesus, was the way of reconciliation to God. He would be loved and adored by some and rejected and scorned by others. Eventually He would be falsely accused of doing wrong and be put to a cruel and humiliating death on a cross. But, after three days He would be resurrected from death in a glorified body. After walking a few days more on earth with His followers, He would go back to His Father in Heaven. He would continue at His Father's right hand until the end of time on Earth, making intercession for each person who truly wanted to be reconciled to God.

continued

People who lived before the Son came to live His short life on Earth would know of the plan either from God Himself or from messengers sent from God to tell people on earth.

WORKING THE PLAN

As was stated in the introduction, action must be taken to complete steps of a plan if end results are to be achieved. God devised the plan of salvation, set it in place, and completed some of the parts and is actively working on other parts He designated Himself to do. What is our part in this great plan? Our (mankind's) part is to seek reconciliation to God when we realize we are separated from Him. For this to occur we must first believe in God's existence, and we must have a desire to know Him. But to be reconciled (saved) we must believe God, trust His drawing Spirit that we feel, and seek to establish a relationship with Him. To establish this relationship we must be drawn by His Holy Spirit, be convicted of our sins, and exercise repentance and faith (given by God's grace). To put this another way: to be saved a person must realize he/she is a sinner, truly be sorry for his/her sins, and, from the depths of the heart, ask for God's forgiveness. The lesson text we have from Psalms 116 tells of this way of salvation.

THE WAY OF SALVATION

The following are the elements or characteristics of the salvation experience as described by the writer of Psalms 116:

- **Accountable:** the point in life that God holds us responsible for our sinful acts. At this point we are separated from God. Verse 3 shows the psalm writer's realization of this: "The sorrows of death (separation) compassed me ..." We have come to the realization that there is something missing within us.
- **Conviction:** God convicts us (pronounces us guilty) of sin. True conviction is the state we reach in which we are totally convinced of our guilt of sin against God and realize our hopelessness to atone for it. Verses 3 and 10, "the pains of hell gat hold upon me; ... I was greatly afflicted." The realization that we are sinners is alarming and frightening.
- **Repentance:** we are truly sorry for the wrong done toward God and feel a sincere desire to do good and right. Verses 3, 4 and 6 "...I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. ... The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low..." We must see ourselves as God sees us – as sinners. Verse 5 tells us God is "righteous" but our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). We must ask and beg for God's mercy and forgiveness.
- **Faith:** putting total belief and trust in God to forgive our sin. Verses 4 and 10, "Then called I upon the name of the Lord; ... I believed ...." In Hebrews 11:6 we find "... for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."
- **Grace:** the help God gives us to overcome. Verses 5 - 6, "Gracious is the Lord, ... yea, our God is merciful. ... I was brought low, and He helped me." Through God's grace, He grants us the faith to repent to His satisfaction and believe Him.
- **Salvation:** the deliverance from sin and preservation from destruction. Verses 7 - 8: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. For thou has delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." It is something we can feel; relief and peace describe the feeling. It is an experience and establishment of our own personal relationship with God.

Now, even though these elements have been listed and described, there are no step-by-step instructions or specific prescription we can give someone to be saved. Saved people can follow the leadership of God and use

the things learned from the scripture to instruct a lost person. But, it is up to the lost person and God only to establish the relationship that brings salvation to that person. Each experience of salvation is unique and personal given by an Almighty God to one individual through His Son, Jesus Christ. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom 10:10).

Look at the example of the jailer from the lesson text from Acts. He had probably heard Paul and Silas praying and singing. After the earthquake when he found the prisoners had not escaped, he fell down before the men of God to ask what he must do to be saved. Then they instructed him to believe on Jesus Christ and "spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." I believe that these men preached to and prayed with these lost people and that each one that was saved had his/her own individual experience of salvation. The jailer and those of his family who were saved each believed on Christ to the saving of his/her soul.

SEARCH FOR TRUE SATISFACTION

As was pointed out in the first lesson of this study, true satisfaction comes through first establishing a personal experience with God, which then enables us to walk with God and seek His will in our lives. It is God's desire for all to come to know the truth - to know Him in the free pardon of sin. I believe that God will provide an opportunity for all who want to come to know Him (2 Peter 2:9).

If you are saved, seek God's will for your life. When he saves us, He has a plan for our lives – to take up our cross daily and follow Him and to be a witness for Him of His mercy and goodness like the psalmist in Psalm 116.

If you are lost (do not have a personal experience with God), please search for such a relationship. Seek the truth. No person can give you this, only God can. Seek the truth. There are many groups of people offering many plans to reach God, but there is only one true way. Jesus is the only way. God has always and will always have only one true plan of salvation.

STUDY REFERENCES:

Ephesians 1:10; Titus 2:11; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8; Genesis 3:15; 1 Corinthians 2:2-8; Luke 13:2; John 4:1-30

SONGS:

"I Would Not Be Denied" by C.P. Jones. A song book that contains this song is Best Loved Songs And Hymns.

"Amazing Grace" by John Newton. This church standard can be found in most church hymnals.

"Jesus Is The One" by Gertie Rast. A song book that contains this song is Songs To Remember Number Five compiled by Sammy Cornwell.

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