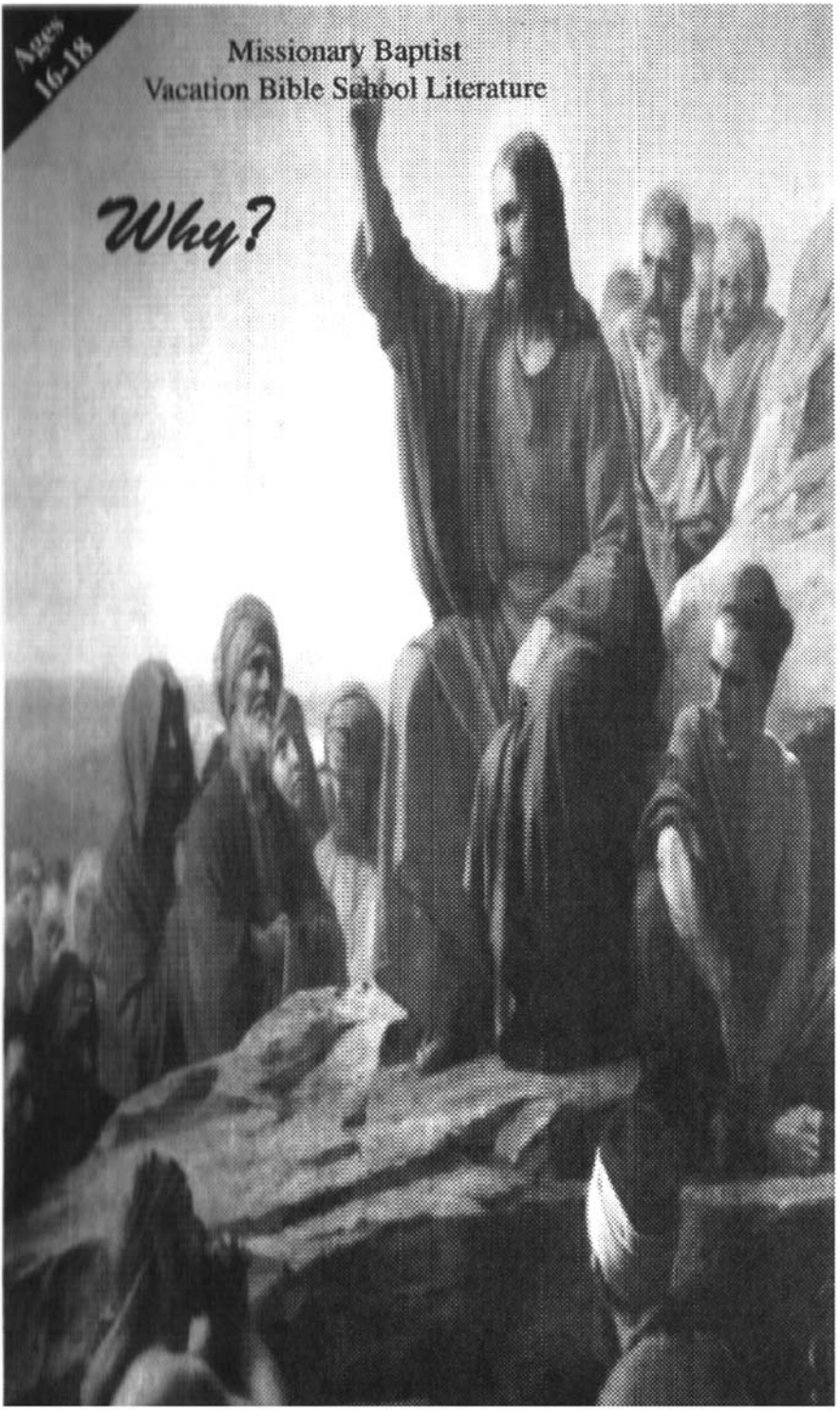
Ages 16-18

Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature

Why?



The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

"WHY?"

Vacation Bible School Lessons for Ages 16–18

Written by Sister Ashley Atkerson, Brother Clifford Hayes,
Brother Mitchell Glasscock and Sister Bobette Pruitt

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LESSON ONE

WHY OBEY?

LESSON TEXT
LEVITICUS 26:3-12

WRITTEN BY
ASHLEY ATKERSON

3. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;
4. Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.
5. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.
6. And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land.
7. And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.
8. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.
9. For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.
10. And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.
11. And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you.
12. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

WHY?

This lesson on obedience is the first in a series that tries to answer the question, "Why?" It is not an easy question. Great thinkers throughout history have tried to answer it with no success. Those of you reading this lesson might expect me to actually answer this question, and I can not do that any more than Aristotle or Socrates could. All I can do is all anyone can do with an unanswerable question – take it to the Lord in prayer. Read His word, draw upon your own life experiences, and pray to God that he will make things clear. (Why pray? We'll talk about that later this week....) Keep in mind, though, that we may never see things as clearly as we want. God is a supreme being, and His ways are sometimes too complex for human beings to understand. Don't let this discourage you from your search for answers. Just remember that God will give you all the knowledge you need, if you seek it honestly and earnestly.

WHY OBEY?

We are at a time in our lives when obedience might be the hardest commandment to follow (and it is a commandment; see Exodus 20:4-6). It is easy for a teenager to follow his or her own set of priorities and forget about God. That is why this lesson is so important. The lesson is set up as a series of questions that might run through your head as you ask yourself, "Why Obey?"

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE?

The lesson text illustrates how obedience will benefit those who obey. Now, you might read through the text and say to yourself, "So what? I mean, I don't own land, I don't thresh, or sow, or chase enemies around with a sword...." So how do these verses apply to you?

The language of the Bible can seem outdated because it uses subjects that are not part of

our daily lives. To apply the wisdom of the Bible to the "here and now" you have to get creative. You see, the Bible's wisdom is universal. No matter how old the Bible gets, the words inside are always true. Here is a challenge for you: take verses 4-10 of the lesson text and come up with "translations" that fit the present day. For example, in verse 6. What if, instead of "land," we use the word "mind," and instead of "evil beasts" and "the sword," we use "sinful thoughts." Now we have:

And I will give you peace in the mind, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid sinful thoughts out of the mind, neither shall sinful thoughts go through your mind.

Now the verse is more applicable to our situation, yet we have not changed its meaning. We have discovered one of the many benefits of obedience: peace.

Last year, a friend and I were up late at night talking, and the subject of religion came up, as it does so unexpectedly sometimes. I became very nervous as the conversation went on. This friend didn't attend church with me and I knew for a fact that she did not believe the things that I did about God. Yet I felt Him pressuring me to tell her about my experience in salvation. *Will my story make her uncomfortable? Will she get offended, thinking I'm trying to force my religious beliefs on her? Could I lose her friendship over this?* These questions are some that we all ask ourselves when we witness to a friend. I was afraid at that time – afraid what would happen if I followed God. And at the same time, I knew that I would continue to feel this despair if I did *not* follow Him. So I told my friend what I knew about God, and about my relationship with Him. Of course she did not get uncomfortable or offended; she realized that I was being sincere. But that does not matter. What matters is that I obeyed God as best I could, and as soon as the words were out of my mouth, I felt a happiness and peace inside me.

Inner peace is just one benefit of obeying God's word. There are many benefits to be gained in this world through obedience. Try to name some others found within the lesson text or from your own mind. The list has no end.

WHY SHOULD I OBEY?

Notice that this is a different question. Sure, there are many benefits of obedience, but those benefits are not the reason why we obey.

The attitude of "What's in it for me?" is a worldly and dangerous one. When we look to the Bible for examples of obedient servants, do we see that attitude? Abraham surely saw no worldly benefits in putting a knife to his beloved son's throat in sacrifice to God because He had commanded it. Noah had no worldly gain from building the ark; the people of his time openly ridiculed him. And look at the most obedient servant of all. Can you imagine Jesus Christ on the cross, asking God, "What will I gain from this, Father?" That is absurd!

The reason none of these obedient servants acted that way is that obedience is not a means to an end. Obedience is an obligation. Why are we obligated to obey? Our obedience is all we can give God in return for his infinite love. In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel says, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...." No works that we do will ever repay God. He has given us life, a free nation in which to live, comfortable homes, loving friends and family, and most importantly a chance to live with Him in heaven for eternity. Now, seriously, do you have anything to give Him in exchange? We must show our love as Jesus asked in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." We obey God to show our love and gratitude for his mercy, not to gain benefits.

WHAT CONSTITUTES OBEDIENCE?

Even the most devoted Christians tend to obey God the way they want to. One might put off prayer until he gets to church, rather

continued

than praying right when God touches his heart. Another might not give an offering because she only has a few dollars and does not want to be broke for the week. This "selective obedience" is what lost sinners suffer from, too. Most of them only want to seek God on their own terms. We must all realize that obedience is the full and complete submission to God's will. If we obey only *sometimes*, we fail to meet our obligation to God – which is bad enough – but we also fail to set an example for others. If I stay in the dorm and watch TV on Wednesday night, how will I convince my friends that they should be in church? Complete obedience is not easy, or even possible, since we are all human and therefore imperfect. But consider this: God made the ultimate sacrifice out of love for us. He allowed his only son to die a horrible death. Complete obedience is the very least we can do to show our gratitude.

Another flaw in the obedience of Christians is the "moaning-groaning" syndrome. "Oh, all right, I guess I'll go to Sunday School." "Sigh, I suppose I can give a little more in today's offering." This kind of obedience is ungrateful and is almost as bad as *disobeying* God's word. Going through the motions of obedience is not enough. We must be obedient in spirit, because our purpose is to try to return God's love – *not to do works*. I admit, I have often rolled out of bed on Sunday morning at 9:00, wondering why Sunday School could not start at 3:00 in the afternoon. But I have to remind myself that obedience is what is important. A little sleep is no great loss compared to the love that God has shown.

CONCLUSION

I told you there were no easy answers to this question! You now know that not only should you obey God, you must obey completely and without complaint. And that includes all God's commandments, from obeying your parents to retaining your Christian standards out in the world. But do not be discouraged. Obeying God is like operating an old-fashioned water pump. If you have never seen one, I will explain: you must pump the handle several times before any water comes out. In the same way, the first times you try to obey God, it may seem useless or pointless. Pretty soon, however, pumping or obeying becomes easier every time until God's blessings come pouring out with almost no effort – living, pure water from a deep well.

Obedience can take many forms. Our next lesson deals with a person's first complete act of obedience: salvation.

Other scripture references for obedience:

Exodus 20:1-17; 25:16; 25:21; 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:1-9; 10:4; 28:1-14; Matthew 22:35-40; Romans 5:12-14; 7:7-13; 8:3; 2 Corinthians 3:7-14; Galatians 2:21; 3:21-26; James 2:9-10; 1 John 3:4;

LESSON TWO

WHY SURRENDER?

LESSON TEXT
ISAIAH 55:6-9

WRITTEN BY
CLIFFORD HAYES

6. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:
7. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
8. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.
9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

INTRODUCTION

The word "surrender" is a verb meaning to give up control, self-determination, will, or possession. While it is a verb, surrender is not so much an action as it is the cessation of self-will, or self-determination, along with permission, invitation, or request for the actions of another. It is very difficult for human beings to surrender and to deal with it when they do. We began our lives completely helpless depending totally upon others to take care of us. Our entire life from birth to adulthood is spent taking control of our lives and our destiny. Giving up any control runs counter to the whole process that we go through in maturing.

In the scripture for our lesson, God is telling us that His ways are higher than our ways, His thoughts higher than ours. He is telling us that he has the strength, power, knowledge, wisdom, and authority to guide our future. Is this enough proof? It should be, but sadly for us humans, it is not. Remember that we are the ones who spend much of our lives struggling for independence– for control. To us humans, power and authority must be proven. We tend not to submit unless it is proven that we should.

God's superiority can, however, be proven to us. God is not a "just take my word for it" God. God does not expect us to open our mouths and swallow every word in the Bible, blindly believing its precepts. This is why God does not communicate with men through the written word only. This is why He sent the Holy Ghost. When accompanied by this Holy Spirit of God, the written word becomes alive, and in this manner He speaks to our hearts directly. His Spirit tells us that He is supreme. When He convinces our hearts of this fact, we are given a knowledge that His ways and thoughts are truly higher than ours. We then know (however in part) His ways more completely than we could ever learn by merely reading of them. We then know that He is the ultimate power and authority to whom we should surrender our will and the control of our lives.

CIRCUMSTANCES FOR SURRENDER

Surrender is usually made to someone who has demonstrated more strength, power, knowledge, wisdom, and/or authority than the person who is surrendering. When a general surrenders his army to another general, it is because of a realization that he is defeated. At this realization he has little choice but to permit the victorious general to dictate terms. When a person surrenders property, he ceases to maintain control over it. He understands that the new owner will do with the property as he pleases.

continued

The victorious general has proven more strength and power than the defeated general. The person to whom property is surrendered is recognized to have more authority than that of the person who gives up the property. In both cases, the power, strength, and authority have been proven. If they had not, there would be no surrender.

The above illustrations will serve as examples of the relationship between God -who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent- and man who is impotent, unlearned in the ways of God and is stubborn and inflexible to the will of God. God has a determined role for all of us. II Peter 3:9 informs us that the position He has for everyone is that of one of His children, *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* For some, the journey from an alien sinner to a repentant child of God is very difficult. Extreme measures must by used by God to break the obstinate human will of the sinner. In the demonstration of His strength, power, knowledge, wisdom and authority, God brings upon the sinner the most devastating of all emotions-Godly sorrow.

Man remains an unhumbled, unbowed and unrepentant creature until this sorrow is experienced. The alien sinner does not have to surrender. The road to hell is broader and easier than living a life for God. This is why Jesus said the way to everlasting life was difficult and narrow. However, when this trouble comes to the sinners soul, he is usually willing to humble himself, bow before God and repent of his sins. He is willing to submit-he is willing to surrender to the will of the Father. Hear the words of the Psalmist, *" The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul"* (Psalm 116:3-4).

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul relates that there is no repentance and therefore no salvation without Godly sorrow. II Corinthians 7:9-10 reads, *"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

SURRENDER- GOD HAS A WORK FOR YOU

Have you ever looked back on your lives and thought of the times that God impressed you to do or say something and you let the opportunity slip away without acting? All of us have been guilty of this. We did not surrender to His will. We may think that those small things that we can do are insignificant and will not make any difference, but in God's design we perform the small acts and God performs the miracles.

Many preachers have denied their call into the ministry for years. Later, after not being able to withstand the power that God exerts, they express grief at not having surrendered earlier and regret the lost opportunities to preach and witness to a lost world.

Many of God's servants were reluctant warriors. Jonah had to spend three days and nights in a fish's belly before he would surrender and submit to the call to preach to Nineveh.

This writer believes Saul (Paul) had been fighting surrender from the time Stephen was put to death by stoning. This is what Jesus meant when he told Saul it was hard *"to kick against the pricks."* When Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, there occurred an amazing act of surrender. Saul was rebelling against the pull of the Holy Spirit by persecuting God's people. His sins were great. Once when writing to Timothy, Paul refers to himself as the chief of all sinners, yet he was brought down on the Damascus road. In words of surrender Saul asks, *"Who art thou, Lord"* and *"Lord, what wilt thou have me do?"* In an instant Saul was saved. He had been battling conviction and the call to repentance for a long time, but at the time of surrender salvation was instantaneous.

God had a part for Saul to play in His great design. He told Ananias that Saul was a *"chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel"*. This was to be Saul's role as determined by God.

SURRENDER AS A RESULT OF BEING SELF DEFEATED

There are times in our lives when we regress to our old temperament and truly feel that we have control of our lives and destiny. This is usually after God has blessed us with material blessings and we forget it is from Him and think we have done it all. Sometimes we become at ease in Zion and have the attitude that God will continue to bless us with no effort on our part. These attitudes are very dangerous in that we cannot serve God or be a witness to others while feeling this way. Be assured that God is the great attitude adjuster and has ways to make us surrender to His will and bring us into submission to the roles He has for us to play. The methods God uses to bring us back into line are many times distasteful but are also effective in reminding us who has control of our lives.

The story of the prodigal son is illustrative of one who thought he had the ability to be in control of his life and make it on his own. This young man was so high minded and so self- important that he wanted his inheritance while his father yet lived. After receiving this legacy; he went on his way, turning his back on his father's teachings and his wisdom. God allowed him enough rope to hang himself. He was permitted to go far enough away from the fold to prove to himself that his paths were wrong and his father's were right. His demeanor changed during the time of his life when he was doing very repulsive tasks and he was near starving. It was at this point that he determined to surrender control of his life to his father and become one of his slaves.

Just as the sinner does not have to submit, the prodigal son did not have to surrender. He could have hardheadedly continued on the same path of self destruction and an early grave. However, in the condition he found himself, he realized his only hope for survival was to surrender his life to his father. He had been defeated, but only by himself. He had to surrender in order to become victorious.

CONCLUSION

In the game of basketball, all the players on the team have a role to play. Some have to rebound, some must play defense. Everyone cannot be the star. A team with five Michael Jordans would be a losing team. Using this analogy, God's team is composed of many players. Jesus is the star and the rest of us are role players. We must accomplish the small acts while Jesus carries the main load. There is a task for all of us, but we must first surrender to the holy will of God.

Other scripture references for surrender:

Exodus 4:16-31; Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 24:26; John 16:7-11; Acts 9:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 4:7,10; 1 Peter 2:25

continued

LESSON THREE

WHY PRAY?

LESSON TEXT
NEHEMIAH 1:4-11

WRITTEN BY
MITCH GLASSCOCK

4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,
5. And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:
6. Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.
7. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.
8. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:
9. But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.
10. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.
11. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson continues the study on the theme of "Why?". In this lesson we seek to answer the question "Why Pray?". No doubt teenagers, especially older teens, ask why many times. Hopefully, this lesson will help you recognize and understand why it is important and beneficial to pray.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Webster's dictionary defines the word pray as follows: to make an earnest, humble request or supplication; to address God with adoration, confession, supplication, or thanksgiving. Some synonyms given are entreat, implore and plead.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus teaches us not to make a public spectacle of praying or to use vain repetitions when we pray just prior to His giving a model of how we should pray. The Bible teaches us some requirements of prayer such as purity of heart (Psalms 66:18-19), having faith (Matthew 21:22), in Christ's name (John 14:13) and in accordance to God's will (1 John 5:14). Also, we should pray with humility and repentance (Luke 18:10-14), persistence (Luke 18:1-8), and intensity (Matthew 7:7-11).

From the dictionary and the Bible we learn that prayer is a conscious appeal to God. It is a desire to commune with Him. Much time could be spent studying what prayer is and how to pray, but this lesson topic is "Why

pray?" If we can see the answer to "why" (the need to pray), then we will better be able to see the importance of "what" and "how".

WITH WHOM DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Think about who you talk with on a regular basis. Do you talk to your parents, other family members, friends, teachers, those you attend school or work with, employers? Why do you talk with these people? Do you find it easier to talk with those with whom you are most familiar? Do you approach and talk to people differently based upon your relationship with them? When you talk to people do you want and expect a response from them? How do you receive this response? Is it difficult for you to know how to talk with someone you have never met? Do you find it more difficult to talk with someone, even someone close, when there is something that has put a strain on your relationship? Think about these questions as you study this lesson and discuss in class.

WHY COMMUNICATE WITH GOD?

Not only does God want us to communicate with Him, but he wants us to desire this communication. As stated at the beginning of this lesson, prayer is the way we talk to God. A person must pray to God to establish a relationship with Him when that person realizes they are lost and the Holy Spirit is dealing with him/her. Once saved, to grow as a Christian we must cultivate our relationship with God – the giver and keeper of our salvation. There are many ways to strengthen our relationship, such as obedience, sacrifice, giving, etc. But, the most important is communication – talking and listening to God – or praying. We need to pray regularly, consistently and earnestly.

Remember, when we pray we are praying to an all powerful, all knowing, all seeing God; show honor and respect. At the same time we are talking to someone that desires communication and a relationship with us; talk to Him as if you are confiding in your best friend – "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Below are listed some reasons that the Bible teaches us why prayer is important:

Obedience – we have a duty to pray.

Surrender or submission – we humbly ask Him to supply our needs, the greatest of which is salvation and seek His will for our lives.

Thanksgiving – we give some of our undivided attention (time) to Him and thank Him for what he gives us.

Worship – we express our recognition, respect, and love to God.

Understanding – We seek to know about Him, to know Him, to increase our knowledge of God – His ways, will, commandments, etc.

Leadership – We ask to know His will for our lives and for His guidance day to day.

Assistance – we ask for His help to obtain the things we need for life.

Faith – we thank, worship, praise and ask with anticipation of results.

Comfort – we obtain inner peace and contentment from God, our great guide, helper and friend.

Do not always just ask things of God, but give reverence (honor and respect) and thanksgiving. Sometimes just talk. Look at the model prayer given by Christ in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 11.

WE MUST LISTEN

We need to also consider the other side of communication – listening. Certainly a separate lesson could be devoted to the topic of listening to God. But let us say here if we pray as God intends, we pray with faith, expecting results. We then must listen to and look for what God is saying to us. At times He may be supplying answers to our prayers. At other times He may be speaking to us of something we need to do or giving us a

continued

warning. How does God speak to us and how do we listen? Some ways He speaks are through preaching, teaching, Bible reading, songs of praise and worship, observation of people and nature. Can you can name others? In each of these and when God deals with us personally He speaks to one's heart (inner man) through His Holy Spirit. So, even though we hear with our ears or see with our eyes we listen with our hearts to understand what God is saying to us.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER – A GOOD EXAMPLE

In our lesson text we find many of the reasons why the average person prays as we look at the prayer offered by Nehemiah. First, look at the circumstances and reasons for Nehemiah's prayer. Verses 2 and 3 just prior to where the lesson text begins give us some background of why Nehemiah prayed. Nehemiah inquired of some men from Judah concerning some of his people which had returned to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity and had attempted to rebuild the walls of that city. He was told that the Jews which had returned were under persecution, construction had stopped, the walls had been broken down and the gates burned. This is what had broken Nehemiah's heart and brought him to his knees in prayer to God (v 4). Nehemiah saw his need and the great need of his people for God's help to overcome the forces opposing the return of the Jews and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Next, let us look in verses 5-7 to see how Nehemiah approached God. He approached God with humility and reverence. He acknowledged God's greatness and majesty and recalled God's covenant with Israel and its conditions. Nehemiah asked God for His attention as he is persistent in prayer and confessed to the sins which the children of Israel had committed against God by breaking the commandments and laws given through Moses. In verses 8-9 Nehemiah asked God to remember the promise to scatter the people if they were disobedient but to gather them if they would turn back to serve and obey Him. By this request he acknowledged to God that he remembered this promise and was willing to follow and obey God.

In verse 10-11 Nehemiah appealed to God to remember who these people are that prayed to Him. He again earnestly asked God to be attentive to his prayer and the prayers of those who desire to fear His name.

Now, the last portion of verse 11 tells us what Nehemiah asked of God. He did not ask God to rebuild the walls and restore the gate. He did not ask Him to send someone else to rebuild the walls. He did not even ask God to allow him to go to rebuild the walls. He asked God to give him mercy and favor in the sight of the king for whom he was cupbearer. Nehemiah was willing to give up his position and use his God given talents and abilities in the effort to restore Jerusalem. He asked God to grant what he within himself or through someone else could not gain – the king's mercy and favor.

RESULTS OF NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

In chapter 2 of Nehemiah we find that God opened the door for Nehemiah. When Nehemiah appeared sad before the king, the king asked him why he was sad. Even though Nehemiah was very afraid, when asked this question he shared the reason for his sadness with the king. The king then asked Nehemiah what request he was making. After praying to God for help, Nehemiah told the king he wanted to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. The king granted his request to return as well as his requests for letters of permission to rebuild and for materials to be used. **How gracious is our God when we approach Him in the right way and are willing to use the abilities He has given us for His cause!** This is why we pray.

CONCLUSION - RESULTS FOR US

We can learn from Nehemiah's prayer, the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), and other prayers prayed by men recorded throughout the Bible. But we can only learn elements of prayer from the prayers of others – how to pray, what to pray for, when to pray, **why** we pray, etc. Each person must search his/her own heart to know how, what, when and why to pray. God through His Holy Spirit deals with people on an individual and personal basis, so a person must to talk to Him that way. Repeating the prayer of someone else will not let an individual reach God. It is the desire of one's own heart that God recognizes and the reason one prays is to express that to Him.

What results can we expect when we pray? Salvation results when, through prayer, a person repents, asks forgiveness, and through faith puts his/her trust in God through Jesus Christ. When a person prays on a regular, consistent, sincere basis a closer relationship with God results. This close relationship brings leadership and assistance with big decisions as well as daily aspects of our lives. We receive God's love, comfort and blessings through good times and times of hardship and trial. Increased knowledge and understanding of God and His plan for us will result from prayerful study of His word. Inner peace, joy and contentment are results of a prayerful life and close relationship with God (Romans 14:17 & 1 Timothy 6:6).

Other scripture references for prayer:

Psalms 51; Psalms 116; Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 18:1-8; 9-14; John 17; James 5:13-18.

LESSON FOUR

WHY GIVE?

LESSON TEXT
2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8

WRITTEN BY
BOBETTE PRUITT

6. But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.
7. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.
8. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work:

INTRODUCTION

Paul is the writer of this lesson, and he is speaking to the Corinthians. Though this lesson text is just three short verses, it is rich with Godly instruction on giving, as well as spiritual harvest, promise, ability, and grace. Hopefully everyone who reads this will walk away with not only a greater understanding of our duties as Christians to give, but also with a greater desire to want to give to God and His cause.

GIVING

Matthew 5:14 tells us that we are the light of the world. As children of God (those saved by grace) and as lights, we are to give guidance and direction for those who are lost, wandering, and struggling in this dark world. How do we do this? By giving. What can we give? We can give what this writer will call the three T's; our Time, our Testimony, and our Tithe. Through time we give service to God, we give our testimony in love to show God's love, and we give our tithe (or a tenth of our means) to further the work of God. In giving of these things, we will be a light that will lead those who are without salvation to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Think of all you have and all you own. How did you obtain those things? Perhaps some things were given to you. But I am sure that you, like others, work very hard to obtain other things you have. Think now of what work requires. It requires a certain amount of education, good health, the ability to communicate, transportation, etc. Are you able to provide these necessities for yourself? The answer is no. God provides all of our needs for us. He gives us the ability to learn, the ability to learn and maintain healthy habits, the ability to communicate, a means of transportation, and so much more. God not only supplies our needs but also supplies the material gain as well. Are you wondering why this is being pointed out? The reason is that God is the ultimate example of *giving*. He has given us everything from the clothes we wear to the air we breath to the life that we live. What an awesome and wonderful example for us to live by! God's giving goes far beyond the necessities and material things also. He gives to us spiritually as well. God's ultimate act of giving was through His son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross so that All of mankind would be able to obtain eternal life. In seeing this ultimate, perfect, and awesome example of *giving*, let us turn to our lesson text and bring out some valuable points in giving for us to learn and live by.

In verse 6 we are told that those who give (sow) sparingly shall receive (reap) sparingly but that those who give in abundance shall receive in abundance. This applies to all aspects of our life. Since all we have comes from God it only makes sense to give back

to God's cause what He has so graciously given us. There are several examples throughout the Bible where God rewards those who give to His cause and to others in need, if done in His name. One example is found in Matthew chapter 25, which is the Parable of the Talents. In this parable three men are given talents (sums of money) according to their ability. The one given five talents, gained five additional talents. The one given two talents, gained two additional talents. And the one given one talent buried his and gained nothing. In this lesson, the master was pleased with the two that had gained from their talents. The master called them "good and faithful servants" and the master gave them even more. But the one who gained nothing, who hid his talent in fear, lost everything and the master referred to him as wicked and lazy. Verse 29 of this chapter tells us that for everyone who has given will have an abundance but whoever does not, even what he has will be taken away from him. God wants us to share what we have so that we can share Him with others. How can we be a light in the world and show other people God if we do not share our light with them through our abilities, talents and gifts? We cannot.

Verse 7 tells us that we all have a purpose, "every man according as he purposeth". We are all unique beings. God has created and given life to each of us for a special reason – we all have a special purpose in God's plan. He wants us to develop our abilities and talents and use them for His good. God knows our every thought and the intent of our heart. He wants us to give cheerfully and willingly in His work. After reflecting on all He has given us we should be inspired and moved to give with great love and joy and want to serve others, just as God has done and continues to do for us.

Think for a minute about giving a gift to someone you care for. Do you, like many people, enjoy and receive great pleasure in seeing someone delight in receiving a gift you have given them? You give the gift in love and kindness and it is received in appreciation and joy. Both parties benefit in the act of giving. Do you think God delights in giving us blessings, providing our needs, giving us eternal life? Absolutely! And He wants us give to His cause and to others in return and thankfulness for what He has given us.

Finally, in verse 8 we see that God will not only provide grace but will also "make all grace abound toward you." This means that God will show favor, kindness, and love toward us so that we will be sufficient in our giving. God promises here that He will always provide us the means to give our time, service, testimony, love, and financial support to His cause and those in need, if we do it bountifully, cheerfully, and in His name.

CONCLUSION

In closing, think again of the perfect and awesome example we have of *giving*, which is God through Jesus Christ. Think of all God has provided you in your life and reflect on how you have given back to God and His ministry. Have you been the light in the world God has called us to be? Remember that when we give to God we provide for His work, we show Him honor, we give Him praise, and we acknowledge His being.

Other scripture references for giving:

Malachi 3:8-12; Matthew 23:23; Luke 6:38; 21:1-4; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 9:9-14; 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

LESSON FIVE

WHY WORSHIP?

LESSON TEXT
JOHN 4:19-24

WRITTEN BY
BOBETTE PRUITT

19. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.
20. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.
21. Jesus saith unto her, woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.
22. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.
23. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.
24. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is often referred to as "The Woman at the Well". Though our text is verse 19 though 24, we are going to review and talk about the entire fourth chapter because it is such a wonderful example of not only worship, but also of salvation and witnessing. As we will see, all three are closely related and tied together and we will discuss all three areas in order to do this topic justice.

SALVATION

In John chapter 4, a Samaritan woman has engaged in a conversation with Jesus Christ. He talks to her about 'living water' or salvation. In this encounter, Jesus reveals Himself and says in verse 14 that "whosoever drinketh of the water that *I* shall give him shall never thirst". In verse 15, this woman asked for the water so that she would not thirst again. Jesus then proceeds to tell her of all she has done in her life. In later verses the Samaritan woman then told Jesus she knew of Christ and Jesus said "I that speak unto thee am He".

This aspect of John chapter 4 is an excellent example of salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. In order for us to be saved, we have to know we are lost and separated from God. It is at this point in our life that God reveals Himself to us through His convicting power. We then have to ask God for forgiveness of our sins. God, who is all knowing, knows the things we have done in our life and the sins we have committed (see this example in verses 16-18). It is for this reason and for the sin of Adam and Eve that we must ask God for salvation. We see this in verses 13 -15. When we completely submit our life to God, realizing and knowing only He can make things right, that is when God will give us the everlasting life He speaks of in verse 14.

WITNESSING

Our lesson also gives an excellent example of witnessing, or telling of our experience of salvation. In John 4:28-29, the Samaritan woman goes to the city to tell the people to "come see a man...is not this the Christ?". Here she is witnessing to others of her experience and encounter with Christ. Her testimony causes others to want to go to Christ (see verse 30). Verse 39 through 42 is wonderful scripture showing us that we cannot obtain salvation by hearing others talk about

it or by taking another person's word that it is real. We must each experience salvation ourselves. John 4:41-42 says "And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." Isn't it wonderful to have the ability to personally know that we have eternal life and have the opportunity to tell about it! Jesus does not have to be with us in the flesh in order for us to obtain salvation, as in the account of this lesson. We have the Holy Spirit that draws us and when we pray, repent, and in faith ask God for salvation, Jesus intercedes (pleads our case) for us with God.

WORSHIP

What does it mean to worship? Webster's dictionary defines it as reverent love and allegiance accorded a deity, ceremonies or prayers by which love is expressed, humble devotion, to honor and love as a deity, to love or pursue devotedly. The main biblical concept of worship is service. Webster's dictionary defines service as work performed for a superior, acts of devotion to God.

See how closely related these two terms are? To worship is to perform a service to and for God.

Matthew 4:10 says "...for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

In the verses of our lesson text, 19 - 24, Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman of worshiping. He explains that we cannot worship what we do not know. Jesus says that true worshipers worship the Father in Spirit and in truth for God is a Spirit. This is where the above explanation of salvation comes in. We must be saved in order to worship and commune with the one, true and living God. If we do not truly know God our worship is in vain. Because Jesus is the Savior of the world and giver of eternal life He is worthy of our love, allegiance, prayers, and humble devotion.

Verses 19-24 also speak of the place of worship. Do you think it matters where you worship God? Have you ever heard people say "I don't have to go to church to be religious or worship God"? The Bible teaches this to be an incorrect way of thinking. All through the Old Testament we see where people created an altar to worship God. These places were often special locations. We also read of temples and tabernacles that were built so that people could go and worship God. These locations were often referred to as holy places. While Jesus was here on earth He established the church, and while the church is not the physical building, it is often the name given the designated building where people come to worship God. The people make up the church and it is the church's responsibility to spread the Gospel. How successful do you think the church would be in spreading the Gospel if everyone decided to stay home and worship God (Hebrews 10:24-25)? Not only does going to church provide a place for the lost to hear the Gospel, but it is also a wonderful place for the saved to learn and obtain instruction from God. It is for these reasons and many more that have not been spoken of here, that the *place* of worship is important.

CONCLUSION

The life of Jesus is the perfect example that we are given to show us how to worship. Remember the definition of worship ...love and allegiance accorded a deity, prayers by which love is expressed, humble devotion. Throughout the bible we see how *Jesus* taught us that worship is done through the love in our hearts toward God. We see how Jesus prayed to God - in the Garden of Gethsemane, we see how Jesus expressed love toward God - by helping the sick and poor, we see how Jesus was humbly devoted to God - by telling and showing people He was the Savior and teaching about God. Once we have been saved by the grace of God, we should honor, love, and show allegiance to God through our actions of obe-

continued

dience, submission and giving and through our prayers so that we can serve Him and help to lead those who are without salvation to Him. God desires us to give him daily worship, praise and service.

Other scripture references for worship:

Exodus 20:1-5; Matthew 4:10; 5:16; John 4:23; Revelations 4:11; Acts 17:24-28; Psalms 95:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Hebrews 1:3; 9:28; 10:1-25 – Negative examples: Zechariah 7:4-14; 2 Timothy 3:5