

DEEP ROOTS BEARING FRUIT



2021 JUNE-JULY LESSONS ADULT STUDENTS

ALFRED STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

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Lesson 1

IS THERE A SONG
IN THE SILENCE?June
6
2021**Psalm 100 (MEV)**

¹ Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth!

² Serve the Lord with gladness;
come before His presence with singing.

³ Know that the Lord, He is God;
it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
and into His courts with praise;
be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

⁵ For the Lord is good; His mercy endures forever,
and His faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 100 (MSG)

¹⁻² On your feet now—applaud God!
Bring a gift of laughter,
sing yourselves into his presence.

³ Know this: God is God, and God, God.
He made us; we didn't make him.
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.

⁴ Enter with the password: "Thank you!"
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.

⁵ For God is sheer beauty,
all-generous in love,
loyal always and ever.

Lesson Story: Psalm 100 | Gospel Reading: John 1:14-17

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING



Looking at the image above, you may see a chorus of praising people. Do you ever imagine what lies behind another's praise? Perhaps there is thanksgiving that God has made a way out of no way or done the exceedingly, abundantly, above all we can ask or think.

However, you may also imagine or identify with a praise that comes even from a place of silence, a place marked by the absence of another. Long after families and friends have left, the phone calls have become less frequent, the last prepared meal has been eaten, and the last sympathy card has been opened, there is the dreadful silence. While loss is never easy, losses during the past year have been great. Due to COVID-19 isolation protocols, many were not able to say goodbye to loved ones who succumbed in the presence of strangers. In the midst of silence, feelings of betrayal by the Miracle Worker, the Healer, and the Creator of Heaven and the Earth, can emerge. Sermons that proclaim "The Lord is Good", echoing Psalm 100, seem to warrant an edit to be interrogative: "The Lord is good? Would a good Lord take nearly 600,000 people

from us? Would a good Lord take and take and take?"

In the midst of these questions and silence, Psalm 100 contains a clear directive, irrespective of season: Make a joyful noise to the Lord!

Why do you think Psalm 100 applies to us during all seasons, even in a place of silence?

LESSON CONTEXT

Psalm 100 is a part of the fourth book of Psalms, including Psalms 90 through 106. Specifically, Psalm 100 is a hymn that creates the atmosphere for temple worship. Characteristic of a hymn, Psalm 100 begins with a call to praise (Psalm 100:1-2) and outlines the Lord is worthy to be praised for His greatness and goodness (Psalm 100:3-5). Within the fourth book of Psalms alone, additional hymns can be located in Psalms 103, 104, and 105. Unsurprisingly, hymns have permeated our own worship services, including musical compilations for Psalm 117 and Psalm 150.

EXAMINING THE STORY

A Call to Worship

Psalm 100: 1-2 is a call to worship, the medium for moving from the tangible to the transcendental. Sometimes we have impromptu praise breaks and do not even understand why, but we know why. The first two verses are a prime example of this, it's not always about understanding, you just "know that you know that you know." It's not until the middle of the passage, the third verse that we are given the reason for the praise. It is here that we are called into acknowledging the authority and the sovereignty of the LORD. Further, we are called to praise because of the goodness, steadfast love, and faithfulness of the LORD. We are to praise God irrespective of the circumstances of life as these reasons remain true: God is our Creator and His sovereignty and goodness endures. Thus, we are continually directed into the presence of God to render praise.

How We Praise Matters

In Psalm 100, we are called to make a joyful noise with gladness and singing because of who God is. Imagine how the praise of His people must sound to God, having generations of His people singing joyfully:

Holy, holy, holy!
 Lord God Almighty
 Early in the morning
 Our song shall rise to Thee
 Holy, holy, holy!
 Merciful and mighty
 God in three persons
 Blessed Trinity!

Yet, this praise at times can seem to be corrupted. Sometimes in today's mainstream Christianity, we are called into worship as a part of what seems to be a church pep rally. People are forcibly encouraged by the praise team, the deacons, and even the preacher to praise the Lord. The Message translation highlights the pep rally mentality of many churches and alludes to the dichotomy between forced worship and authentic worship, which is not always found within the walls of the church. May we be mindful of rendering a praise due to our good and great God.

Praise in spite of

God's worthiness of praise is unchanging, yet, our praise through the seasons of our life can change us. Praise offered during seasons of abundance allow one to remember the source of all we are and will ever have. While the worship offered by the marginalized is not better than that of the privileged, we can acknowledge the role our suffering and struggles play in developing an authenticity of our worship, a worship rendered when all one may have is the creating and sustaining God. The Bible is replete with examples of people whose worship never depended

on their status. Thus, we are called to worship in spite of our circumstances.

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder if one of the purposes of praise is to "quiet the silence", especially when you have experienced trauma, such as the loss of a loved one.
2. I wonder what experiences have helped you to more authentically worship today.
3. I wonder how you can continually worship God even in the "where's the LORD in this mess" moments or "why would a good LORD let something bad happen to one of his children" inquiries.

LIFE APPLICATION

Is "enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise" only about the physical church—given the impact of the pandemic on church attendance?

Consider how you would like to or have been able to continue praising outside of the church, and what practices have you developed that you will continue once you can return to the church building. How would you explain Psalm 100 to a new believer after the past year? Share as you feel led.

GOING OUT

Over the coming weeks, pay attention to the times when the noise of silence may be overwhelming you. Reflect on Psalm 100 as you praise your way out of the noise. Focus on the importance of meditation and quieting the mind by spending at least five minutes a day at a designated time in dedicated mindful meditation.

PRAYER

LORD, teach me to praise You with an authentic worship. Help me to praise and worship You regardless of my situation. Help me better understand who You are. May my soul long for You, thirst for You, and seek to be in right relationship with You. In Jesus' name, Amen

Lesson 2

HEALING
THROUGH LAMENTJune
13
2021**Psalm 13 (KJV)****For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

¹ How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?
 how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? ²
 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having
 sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine
 enemy be exalted over me? ³ Consider and hear
 me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep
 the sleep of death; ⁴ Lest mine enemy say, I have
 prevailed against him; and those that trouble me
 rejoice when I am moved. ⁵ But I have trusted in
 thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.
⁶ I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt
 bountifully with me.

Psalm 13 (NIV)**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

¹ How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
 How long will you hide your face from me? ²
 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and
 day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long
 will my enemy triumph over me? ³ Look on me
 and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes,
 or I will sleep in death, ⁴ and my enemy will say,
 “I have overcome him,” and my foes will rejoice
 when I fall. ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love; my
 heart rejoices in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing the
 Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me.

Lesson Story: Psalm 13 | Gospel Reading: John 6:35-40

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Watch the opening video on trauma:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ5D4-OYpxo>

After reading Psalm 13, how you see signs of trauma present from the perspective of the author?

LESSON CONTEXT

Psalm 13 is a psalm of individual lament. This psalm includes the six elements characteristic of lament: 1) an address, 2) the complaint, 3) a petition, 4) the writer's motivations, 5) a confession of trust, and 6) a vow of praise (Michael Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)). In the psalm, David addresses the Lord, Yahweh, at the beginning of verse 1, and outlines his complaint in the remainder of verse 1 and verse 2. David makes his petition for the Lord to consider him and give light to his eyes in verse 3 and outlines the motivation, to prevent his enemies from prevailing and rejoicing over him. Yet, David confesses his trust in God's steadfast love and takes joy in salvation in verse 5, vowing to praise God through song in verse 6.

EXAMINING THE STORY

Most of the Psalms have been attributed to David. Other writers include Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, Heman, Jeduthun, Asaph, and the three sons of Korah. The Psalms (songs/poetry) were written and codified in stages over the course of Israel's history. Like other ancient Near East cultures, the Israelites had songs that were written in honor of their God. These songs typically used repetition of lines or themes to highlight the subject. "Ancient poetry/songs were laid out in a form which scholars call parallelism" (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible). The second line may repeat the first line or some semblance of the first. Also, the second line may be antithetical to the first line or it may put two thoughts together that are complementary.

A great example of parallelism is in Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream Speech*. The repetition of a phrase is called an anaphora:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

Similarly, Psalm 13 contains an anaphoric phrase, "How long". Through the use of anaphora, David poignantly outlines his grievances to God in verses 1-2. According to Theodoret, Psalm 13 was written by David while fleeing Absalom rather than Saul; if written at the time of fleeing Saul, we would expect David to speak more boldly, but at the time of fleeing Absalom, David had committed sin that could be the cause of the mourning and groans reflected in his words (Christianity.com).

All of us have been in seasons of our lives like David in which we believe God has forgotten us. If God forgets us, however, it would be like forgetting Himself. We are made in His image and we have the Spirit of God within us. John 15:4 says, Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abides in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. However, God may not answer our prayers according to our desires. There is either an affirmative, negative or wait answer. While the negative answer can be undesirable, it can be the waiting that is unbearable. This is where preparation and growth happen. Brittney Moses, clinical psychology graduate (UCLA) and blogger, who uses her blog to minister to the mental health needs of Christians, says the following:

Many times when God isn't changing your circumstances, it's mostly because He's mostly concerned with changing you within your circumstances. Your character, inner strength, your integrity matters to Him because they are everlasting qualities. The wisdom, strength and the maturity that grows within you are things you'll need to

sustain God's calling on your life. Know that there is purpose in your pain. (Facebook-Brittney Moses)

We all have callings on our lives. During painful seasons, we can consider the possibility that God allows challenges for our good and His purpose, so that we can be better prepared to minister to a fallen world. Further, it is during seasons that result in psalms of lament that we can grow in our understanding of God. Through lament, we can experience the dynamics of God as the God who can not only handle our lament but also responds. Further, in moving from a place of complaint to acknowledging trust in God, we find that vengeance is not ours and can return to a place of praising God. Through lament, we find a place to practice an active faith that engages God in the fullness of His unfailing love and abiding grace.

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder do laments and praises sound the same to God.
2. I wonder what God sees in you that He is willing to allow you to go through trials that He may be glorified.

3. I wonder how many situations you have gone through and missed the purpose that could potentially be a way to minister to someone who is going through the same thing.

LIFE APPLICATION

Reflect on a painful season in your life and how you may have experienced trauma, a wound of the heart and mind that caused deep suffering (Trauma Healing Institute).

How might a psalm of lament support someone going through a painful season? How are psalms of lament beneficial to someone going through a bountiful season?

GOING OUT

God knows and sees all. He has seen history we have never seen and He sees what is in the future. John 16:33 states that "ye shall have tribulation". Being a child of God does not absolve us from suffering. John 16:33 further states "to be of good cheer". This phrase in Greek is *thar-se-o*. It can be translated as "have courage". This means that we are not necessarily going to be cheerful or happy all the time. This week, consider how you can continue in faith through difficulties because Jesus has redeemed us and has overcome the world.

PRAYER

God, I do not always understand how You are working through my difficulties. I acknowledge that You are omnipotent and omnipresent. I know that You love me with an everlasting love. Help me to hold on to Your love, especially during difficult seasons, that I may see my purpose and Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 3

GETTING HOME

June
20
2021

Psalm 23 (KJV)**A psalm of David**

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
- ³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
- ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23 (NIV)**A psalm of David**

- ¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,
- ³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Lesson Story: Psalm 23 | Gospel Reading: John 10:1-4

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Watch the video as a retelling of the story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFThXbDVtvq>

This video is from the movie “Apollo 13.” This scene is titled “Getting Home.” While watching the movie, try to think of instances where God has provided a clear path despite the clouds that form in our lives.

LESSON CONTEXT

Psalm 23 is probably the most cherished of all the psalms. Many of us have committed it to memory, and it can be found in many greeting cards. Upon reading the psalm, some have concluded Psalm 23 is a psalm of lament, thanksgiving, and/or a song of trust. However, this psalm is considered to be individual rather than communal.

EXAMINING THE STORY

David is the author of Psalm 23. Torah and Talmud scholar Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki posits that this psalm was composed while David was on the run from King Saul where he hid in the dry Judean forest of Hereth (Chabad.org). David was near death when God intervened and saved him. We often hear of stories of people lost in a desert thinking that they see streams, rivers, or oases. Perhaps David had gotten that desperate and began to think that he may die in the desert.

At the onset, David analogizes God to a shepherd in the manner God cares for him. The shepherd is a commonly used metaphor in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is often regarded as sheep and God as the shepherd. In the New Testament, Jesus is the “good shepherd,” and His believers are His sheep. Each metaphor points to a monotheistic God who is intimately involved with His people.

Shepherds were responsible for leading sheep to better pastureland and access to water, ensuring their needs were met. Green pastures and bodies of water were where the sheep would receive

nourishment. The metaphor of the shepherd is broadened even more. Not only does God provide food and water, He also provides restoration of the soul and righteousness.

There is a tendency for us to believe that if we make provisions for ourselves, the future will take care of itself. We know personally or have heard of those who seemingly did all the right things, but faced challenges, setbacks, or loss. The entire world was shocked at the death of Kobe Bryant, who easily ranked in the top 10 of the best basketball players of all time and who provided millions to nonprofit organizations. The future is not assured to be without challenges. Just as David faced a dire situation and was able to exclaim, “Yea though I walked through the valley of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me and thy rod and thy staff comfort me and ... goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” we too have to trust God as our shepherd who will guide us home.

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder how your understanding of the differences between needs and wants alters your prayers.
2. I wonder how the world would be affected if you became a walking billboard for Psalm 23.
3. I wonder how you can learn to see the challenges and difficulties of life as steppingstones on the way to growth and nourishment.

LIFE APPLICATION



Psalm 23 is an individual psalm but could it have communal value?

The image above captures the nature of a shepherd and sheep. Sheep follow the shepherd, and sheep often flock together. Humans often can exhibit flocking behavior also, consider Psalm 133 and John 17:22.

If an individual psalm, why is Psalm 23 so prevalent in communal settings?

How might a community of believers benefit from an individual psalm, like Psalm 23?

GOING OUT

The metaphor of a shepherd leading his sheep is a vivid example of God's faithfulness and great love for us. The picture of a shepherd walking ahead, using a stick to prod and prompt his sheep toward better ground, is how God interacts with us. He sees what is ahead, whether it is danger, green pastures, storms, or still waters. The sheep do not know what is ahead, but they keep their eyes on the shepherd, trusting Him. Even when one sheep strays, the shepherd looks for it. Consider how you can better keep your eyes on the Shepherd this week.

PRAYER

I worship you, O God, as my shepherd. Help me to follow You through good times and bad times, through the beauty of sunshine and the turbulence of storms. I will fear no evil, for You promised to be with me.

Amen.

Lesson 4:

AN OVERCOMER'S PRAISE

June
27
2021

Lesson Story: Psalm 30 | Gospel Reading: John 6:67-69

Psalm 30 (KJV)

Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Death

I will extol thee, O Lord; for thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. ³ O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. ⁴ Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. ⁵ For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. ⁶ And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. ⁷ Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. ⁸ I cried to thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. ⁹ What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth? ¹⁰ Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper. ¹¹ Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; ¹² To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

Psalm 30 (NIV)

Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Death

¹ I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. ² Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. ³ You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. ⁵ For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. ⁶ When I felt secure, I said, "I will never be shaken." ⁷ Lord, when you favored me, you made my royal mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. ⁸ To you, Lord, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy: ⁹ "What is gained if I am silenced, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness?" ¹⁰ Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me; Lord, be my help." ¹¹ You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, ¹² that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Watch the video of who was an overcomer, Richard Allen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zd-PuQZVFE>

Richard Allen was born into slavery in 1760. When Allen was 17, he converted to Methodism after hearing a white preacher denounce slavery. Allen convinced the preacher to share his message with his slave owner, who had previously sold Allen's mother and siblings away. After hearing the preacher's message, the slave owner was convicted and converted to Methodism also. A few years later, he allowed Allen to purchase his freedom.

Allen eventually found work at a Methodist church in Philadelphia. He was an assistant minister and was allowed to preach and conduct bible study, with limitations because he was black. Allen grew weary of these constraints and started an independent Methodist church. This would go on to be called the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Today there are over a hundred AME churches in the United States, Liberia, United Kingdom, South Africa, and Angola.

The growth and spread of the AME church by Allen, starting when he was 17 years old and still a slave, shows how one can overcome challenges and find purpose on the other side of struggles.

Considering Richard Allen's story of overcoming slavery and the author of Psalms 30 overcoming sickness and being restored to life, how do you think these experiences would impact one's praise?

LESSON CONTEXT

Psalms 30 is a psalm of individual praise. Characteristic of a psalm of praise, it contains an introduction or call to praise, a reason for praise, and a closing call to praise or reassurance within the situation. However, the psalm is not purely of individual nature, as the superscript notes this psalm was to be provided communally in dedication of the temple.

EXAMINING THE STORY

Prior to Antiochus IV's rule, who ruled from 175 BCE to 164 BCE, the Jews enjoyed religious freedom. However, Antiochus IV, Alexander the Great's successor, forbade Jews to worship on the Sabbath, practice circumcision, encouraged idolatry, and burned copies of the Law. Further, these policies were enabled by Hellenistic Jews, who were eager to merge their monotheism with the polytheism of the Greeks.

This alliance between the Hellenistic Jews and Antiochus IV angered the priestly families of Judaism. They were called the Maccabees. When Antiochus IV desecrated the Temple, sacrificing pigs on the altar, the Maccabees went to survey the desecration. They saw that only one day's supply of oil was available to light the menorah. The menorah was supposed to be lit daily and on special festival events (see Exodus 21:27). However, each day the Maccabees arrived at the Temple, the menorah remained lit. The menorah continued to be lit for eight days. The Jews believed that this was a miracle. This miracle is commemorated by the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah.

"Jewish customs mandates that a psalm is recited each weekday and a special psalm for each festival" (Brettler, Duke University). Psalm 30 was selected to be read during Hanukkah. Jews saw Psalm 30 as a prophecy and praise of the miracle of the menorah. Scholars have suggested that certain words and phrases were inputted so to provide more proof of this miracle.

In Psalm 30:1-3, David begins by giving thanksgiving to the Lord for lifting him up and not allowing his foes to rejoice over him, healing him from a serious illness, and keeping him alive. While David does not provide a detailed account of the events referenced, one can imagine many circumstances came to mind. David's resume included being a shepherd, an unlikely hero in slaying the Philistine Goliath and later warrior who slayed tens of thousands, a fugitive, an adulterer, and a murderer (1 Samuel, Psalms). Yet, his resume also included being the king that united the entire kingdom of Israel. In this psalm, David's reflection pays homage to the role of God in establishing him as king and his kingdom.

The psalmist moves beyond his personal encounter and extols the saints to also give thanks. It is in verse 5 that we receive a familiar line: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. David maintains the Lord's favor endures. In verses 8-10, he shares his prayer of lament and the Lord's answer: Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness (verse 11). He concludes that his thanks will be to God forever.

In Psalm 30, David reveals a response to overcoming many life circumstances. He begins reflective and lifting thanksgiving to God. However, his praise does not stop there. He looks beyond himself to extol the saints that they also should praise God and he provides encouraging testimony that God's favor endures. Psalm 30 would still read as a psalm of praise without verses 4-5, but perhaps David intended to convey that even our individual praise is connected to our community. David's praise moves forward uninhibited, but his testimony provided an opportunity to draw the saints to the God of enduring favor. David's praise calls us to consider how we, as overcomers, respond in praise and how we use our praise to uplift others.

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder how one should celebrate and praise God for His miracles in one's life.

2. I wonder if the miracles in your life were realized because you have a special calling.
3. I wonder if there is a particular psalm that resonates with you currently to show appreciation for the miracles God has provided.

LIFE APPLICATION

Reflect on your personal praise. How can your praise continue to be authentic to God while also uplifting others?

How has the personal praise of others to God impacted you?

GOING OUT

The Jews went into the Temple expecting to see the complete desecration of the Temple. However, seeing the lit menorah with oil for one day, compelled them to return every day to see the miracle of one day's oil stretching into eight days of oil. Small miracles happen every day. When we return to places of worship or re-visit challenges in our lives, we should be able to see the miracles God provided. Arising to greet each day, whether rain or shine, is a miracle. In our previous lesson, we reviewed that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. This means we should be able to see the goodness and mercy God provides each day. Consider how you can be in a constant state of praise.

PRAYER

I praise you, God. You have provided miracle after miracle in my life. Forgive me, O Lord, for being distracted or preoccupied not to see and appreciate Your miracles. Open my eyes that I may see Your glory every day. Help me to come up with unique praise for what You have done for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 5:

THE HIGHEST PRAISE

July
4
2021

Psalm 150 (KJV)

¹ Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

² Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

³ Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

⁴ Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

⁵ Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

⁶ Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

Psalm 150 (NIV)

¹ Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.

² Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.

³ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre,

⁴ praise him with timbrel and dancing, praise him with the strings and pipe,

⁵ praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

Lesson Story: Psalm 150 | Gospel Reading: John 4:24-26

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Psalm 150 is the basis for many hymns. Here are just a few of the best known of them:

- “All People That on Earth Do Dwell”
- “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”
- “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee”
- “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”
- “O Worship the King”
- “For the Fruit of All Creation”

Psalm 150 is an integral part of the gospel music tradition. The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, on its album *High and Lifted Up*, features a song titled “Psalm 150.” On his album *Persuaded*, gospel artist Richard Smallwood, who has written several songs based on the Psalms, based his “Anthem of Praise” on Psalm 150:3-6.

The choral piece, “Psalm 150,” by Alberto Randegger, was performed by the Trinity Choir of Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. Soprano soloist Brandie Sutton sang with soaring notes as the orchestra and choir did a call and response of “Praise Ye The Lord.” <https://youtu.be/NCNx9oAP0M8>

Why do you believe Psalm 150 has inspired so many songs that permeate worship services?

LESSON CONTEXT

Psalm 150 serves as both the doxology to the Book of Psalms and the end of our six-week study of the psalms. We started with Psalm 1, which declares “blessed is the one who delights in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night” (NIV). We encountered psalms of lament (Psalms 13) and psalms of praise (Psalms 100). However, our study ends with the final psalm, which declares the Lord is worthy to be praised.

EXAMINING THE STORY

It is difficult to determine exactly when the Psalms were written. What is generally believed, though, is that they were written between the 9th and 5th centuries BC, ending shortly after the Babylonian exile. During this

time, the people of Israel endured many circumstances warranting lament yet still found reasons to praise to the Lord.

The Psalms are divided into five books. Book I, chapters 1-41, is ascribed to David. Book II, chapters 42-72, introduces us to sons of Korah and the Levite temple singers as authors. The word *maskil* is also introduced in Book II. *Maskil* means contemplative poem. Book III, chapters 73-89, continue with the authorship from the sons of Korah, but with the addition of a Psalm of David (86) and a Psalm of Ethan (89). Book IV, chapters 90-106, has some unnamed authors, but Psalm 90 is ascribed to Moses and Psalms 103 and 106 are ascribed to David.

The final section, Book V, covers Psalm 107-150. Psalms 146-150 are praise songs. Each of these psalms begins and ends with “Hallelujah.”

Psalm 150 is the ultimate praise psalm. It commands us to praise God anywhere and with anything. Note the repetition of the phrase “Praise him.”

Praise not only gives God what God is due, our prayers and worship are beneficial to our brains, particularly in times of stress, found Michael Liedke, Doctor of Nursing Practice, in a study of the “Neurophysiological Benefits of Worship” published in the *Journal of Biblical Foundations and Faith*. “Advances in imaging technology as well as an overall increase in neuroscience knowledge, have allowed us to peer into the workings of the real-time brain,” Liedke said. Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg used Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) in a study of the brain’s response to prayer and worship that included people from a variety of different faiths. The study found “actual quantifiable changes in brain volume and metabolism” when compared to baseline responses of a brain not engaged in prayer and worship. Thus, praising God not only gives God the glory but also brings life to us as God’s people.

BREAKTHROUGH

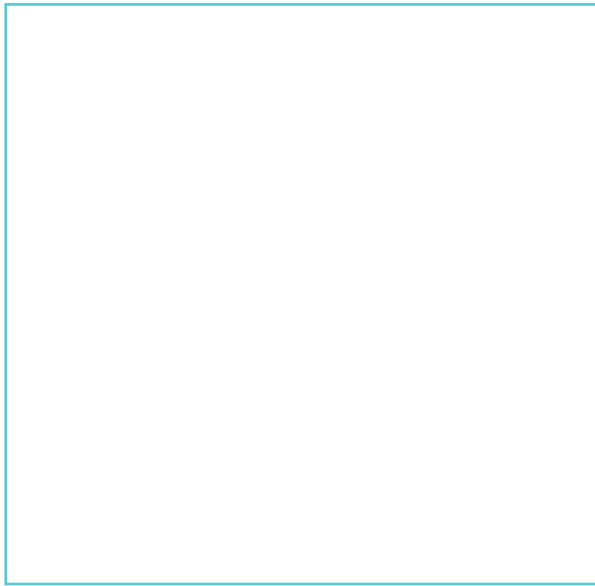
1. I wonder how praising God helps bring life to you and your situations.
2. I wonder if corporate praise is implied by Psalm 150 and how this looks in tandem with everything that has breath.

3. I wonder how the absence of one's praise impacts the orchestra of praise (Psalm 150:3-5).

LIFE APPLICATION

Can you imagine Psalm 150 presented in another mode of expression, such as art? What images come to mind?

Draw an image inspired by Psalm 150.



GOING OUT

Psalm 150 concludes the Psalms by declaring everything that has breath must praise the Lord because of God's mighty deeds and greatness. Our praise is not limited to a specific building location or style of expression. This week, consider how you can give God the highest of praise.

PRAYER

You, O God, have proven to be a worthy God. Nature displays Your glory. Your work for and among us displays Your glory. Your glory was seen at the Cross and in the Resurrection. The reconciling love You have for us is glory. Help us to praise You during good times and bad times so that others will see the blessing of following You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lesson 6:

A NEW IDENTITY

July
11
2021

Lesson Story: Ephesians 1:1-14 | Gospel Reading: John 14:25-27

Ephesians 1:1-14 (KJV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. ⁷ In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; ⁸ Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹ Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: ¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹² That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ¹³ In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:1-14 (NIV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. ¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Video: Your Identity in Christ:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlfK482mFU4>

How do you answer the question, Who am I?

How does your identity in Christ impact your approach to life?

LESSON CONTEXT

Ephesians, an epistle of Paul or one of his disciples, was written in the early 1st century A.D. It was written to the church at Ephesus, which is now modern-day Turkey. It is notable because it is the home of the temple of the Greek goddess Artemis. Paul visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey.

Ephesus is not named in the original manuscript. This leads scholars to believe that the letter to the Ephesians was a circular letter. Think of the “circulars” everyone receives in the mail. Finally, there is evidence that Paul had his assistants write the letter (CEB Women’s Bible)

Ephesians makes the Resurrection come alive, not as a past event, but an event that can shape the future. It also puts the nature of sin where it belongs: on the blood of Christ. He writes this so that the Ephesians can accept fully that the sin debt has been paid.

EXAMINING THE STORY

Lou Johnson, a 1965 World Series hero for the Los Angeles Dodgers, tried for thirty years to recover the championship ring he had lost to drug dealers in 1971. Drug and alcohol abuse cost him everything from that magical season, including his uniform, glove and the bat he used to hit the winning home run in that deciding game.

When Dodger’s president Bob Graziano learned that Johnson’s World Series ring was about to be auctioned off on the internet, he immediately bought the ring for \$3,457 and gave it to Johnson, sixty-six, who had been drug-free for years and a Dodger community relations employee. He did for

Johnson what Johnson could not do for himself. Likewise, Christians can testify to a spiritual rebirth as a result of the price Jesus paid on the cross in their place. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves (PreachingToday.com).

In the lesson story, we are presented a trinitarian view of God’s work in adopting the Ephesians, Gentiles, and us, into the family of faith. God the Father chose us as His people (Ephesians 1:3-6), Jesus the Christ redeemed us by His blood (Ephesians 1:7-12), and the Holy Spirit protects us by sealing our salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14). Thus, we have an identity freely provided by the redemptive work of Christ. We are:

- Blessed (verse 3)
- Chosen (verse 4)
- Predestined (verse 5)
- Accepted (verse 6)
- Redeemed (verse 7)
- Forgiven (verse 7)
- Enlightened (verse 8-9)
- Heirs (verse 11)
- Sealed (verse 13)
- Assured (verse 14)

(The MacArthur Study Commentary)

Through the lesson story, we have a greater understanding of God and our identity in Christ.

The greeting found in Ephesians 1:1-2 outlines a set of relationships. First, Paul establishes himself as an apostle of Jesus by the will of God, addresses the faithful saints of Ephesus, and acknowledges that God is their shared Father. This first reference to Father sets the groundwork for the establishment of the familial structure continually referenced throughout the book of Ephesus. Further, by appealing to God as “Father”, the writer appeals to the understanding of a father as one who would be responsible for the household (Harper Collins Study Bible).

Subsequently, in verses 3–14, the people of Ephesus are reminded of the blessing of being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and destined for adoption by God as His children through Jesus Christ. How many times have we forgotten the central

message of Christianity? We can become wrapped up in our own strength, will and intelligence so that when we make a mistake, we start to feel as if we did not do our best. We also walk around with shame, even when we have been offended, somehow bottling up inside us that the offense was due to our inadequacy. However, we can find comfort in Ephesians 1:5, which outlines that God had a plan to draw us into the family of faith by the redemptive blood of Jesus. Through Jesus, we have forgiveness of our sins. Thus, it is not by our works, but by God's grace that we have been accepted into the beloved.

While we can rejoice in the grace afforded us, we can rejoice in being recipients of knowledge of the mystery of God's will through Jesus. Therefore, as we thank God for the redemptive work of Jesus, we also can receive peace and reassurance of our future in Christ. Further, we are reassured of our shared destiny with those gathered in Christ. In Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul conveys it is God's plan in the fullness of time to gather together all things in Christ in heaven and earth for God's glory. How often we worry of the unknown, yet, Ephesians 1 reveals that God wanted us and adopted us as His own, giving an inheritance – a destiny – to those in Christ Jesus.

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder how knowing your destiny and identity as one in Christ impacts or would impact your approach to God.
2. I wonder what this story conveys about the longevity of our relationship with others,

including unbelievers, and how it impacts or could impact these relationships.

3. I wonder how Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus prompts you to respond.

LIFE APPLICATION

Consider the identifiers of those adopted into the family of faith. Which one of these identifiers do you most identify with in your life, and why? Which one of these would you highlight to a non-believer to explain the identity of one adopted into the family of faith?

GOING OUT

We live in the western culture which regards success as individually-focused. This can lend itself to feelings of inadequacy because there is so much pressure to single handedly be the best, the most skilled, the richest or the most famous. Eastern cultures regard success with a focus on community and family. Naturally, these cultures are not as pressurized.

Despite where we live, the book of Ephesians emphasizes that Christ has reconciled us to God, but not on our own merits. Christ, as the hymn "To God Be the Glory" states, "... yielded His life an atonement for sin, and opened the life gate that all may go in." Over this week, reflect on the identity you have in Christ and how this impacts your life.

PRAYER

Lord, I can get so wrapped up in myself, that I forget that You paid the price for my sin at the Cross. There is nothing I can do to make this happen for myself as I am subject to sin. Thank You for reconciling me to the Creator. In Jesus' name, Amen

Lesson 7:

WANTED BY GOD

July
18
2021

Ephesians 2:11-22 (KJV)

¹¹ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NSRV)

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually[e] into a dwelling place for God.

Lesson Story: Ephesians 2:11-22 | Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Video (0.00-1.08): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Qt5iciYa3k>

Do you feel wanted by God?

If so, how does it feel to know that you are wanted by God?

EXAMINING THE STORY

Anyone who has ever applied to join a club, association or school understands that an application process is required. For example, an application to a college may require a certain grade point average and particular score on a college entrance exam. Ephesians 2:11-22 examines the requirements for entry into a burgeoning 1st century faith. The requirements for entry are made more interesting in that this new faith has its roots in an ancient, established faith tradition.

EXAMINING THE STORY

The Christian writer and theologian C.S. Lewis wrote of an “inner ring” referencing a group to which everyone desires to belong but to which there are barriers to entry. Ephesians 2:11-22 speaks to the “inner ring” that was the 1st century church in Ephesus. The barrier to entry for the church at Ephesus was circumcision, a topic that has arisen before. This requirement was the result of an attempt by some to hold on to the practices of Judaism; the faith from which Christianity has its roots. Genesis 17:9-14 establishes circumcision as the sign of the covenant or promise between God and Abraham signifying an exclusive relationship between God, Abraham, and his descendants. However, with Jesus issuing the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and following the events at Pentecost in Acts 2, the Gospel began to spread beyond the confines of Judaism. The result was the addition of people from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs and personal values.

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are barriers to entry. Ephesians 2:11-22 speaks to the “inner ring” that was the 1st century church in Ephesus. The barrier to entry for the church at Ephesus was circumcision, a topic that has arisen before. This requirement was the result of an attempt by some to hold on to the practices of Judaism, the faith from which Christianity has its roots. Genesis 17:9-14 establishes circumcision as the sign of the covenant or promise between God and Abraham signifying an exclusive relationship between God, Abraham, and his descendants. However, with Jesus issuing the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and following the events at Pentecost in Acts 2, the Gospel began to spread beyond the confines of Judaism. The result was the addition of people from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs and personal values.

Inclusion

In the book of Ephesians, the writer seeks to promote cohesiveness between a seemingly disparate membership. The theme of Ephesians is the coming together of all things in Christ. That includes believers of every ethnicity and station. While God gave a vision to Peter that disputed the long-held belief that there was clean and unclean amongst God’s highest creation, humankind; Paul took the vision and put it into practice on a larger scale. For Paul to accomplish his particular calling of Apostle to the Gentiles, inclusion could only be accomplished by the removal of barriers to the “inner ring” of belief and following the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The Jews may have been holding on to the covenantal practice of circumcision, but the Gentiles were not without their own prejudices. They felt superior in part that they were converts without the foreknowledge of a Messiah. Therefore, they had trouble with adherence to an ancient practice that was not a part of their own history. Both sides felt they were better than the other. Paul deemed this behavior as unacceptable and wrote with a possible solution. The new faith was about unity amongst the whole body of believers. Barriers being held by both sides had to cease in order for the cause of Christ to move forward. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. (Ephesians 2:14 NRSV)

The Importance of Keeping Traditions

The Ephesians 2:11-22 pericope also serves as a reminder that the past is not to be forsaken. The ancient promises of God to Abraham are just as relevant to Gentiles. The relationship between God is open to all; the promises are alive and influencing the faith and those who believe even today. As some would say it is not good to throw out the baby with the bath water. Jesus spoke of not coming to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Jesus came to show a new and inclusive way of worship. The promise may have originally been given to a certain people but the Good News is open to all.

3. I wonder if the Great Commission may mean overcoming one's own prejudices when spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

LIFE APPLICATION

One component of exclusionary behavior is implicit bias defined as the pre-reflective attribution of particular qualities by an individual to a member of some social out group. Does implicit bias influence who we, as Christian members of an established religious institution, serve and evangelize those who are not church members? Discuss how implicit bias may influence Christian attitudes toward serving and evangelizing those who may be considered "other." (Video that can be viewed Prejudice and Discrimination: Crash Course Psychology #39 - YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7P0iP2Zm6a4>)

BREAKTHROUGH

1. I wonder if the Ephesian example of how to deal with exclusionary policies sparks any ideas for solutions to present day divisions within American society.
2. I wonder if this lesson brings to mind any exclusionary practices of the Church (organized religious institutions such as Baptist or Methodist churches).

GOING OUT

To completely disregard the roots of Judaism is to misunderstand the role of Jesus in bridging the gap between the old and the new. When Jesus quoted scripture, He recited what we today call the Old Testament. Matthew 28:16-20 did not come with a caveat as to who can be witnessed to, nor does it come with a set of requirements for membership. It is important to understand that Jesus set the example for true relationship. His arms are open to all who will come. Are your arms open, likewise?

PRAYER

Heavenly God, we pray that You remove from our minds and hearts the seed of bias. We pray that as we move forward in our walk that You will give us open hearts, minds, eyes and arms to all those who we may consider as "other".

Lesson 8:

CONNECTED TO
THE GRIDJuly
25
2021

Lesson Story: Ephesians 4:1-16 | Gospel Reading: John 15:1-4

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NKJV)

- ¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,
- ² with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love,
- ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling,
- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all, and in you all.
- ⁷ But to every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
- ⁸ Therefore He says, "When He ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men."
- ⁹ (Now that He ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
- ¹⁰ He who descended is the same also as He who ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.)
- ¹¹ And truly He gave some to be apostles, and some to be prophets, and some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,
- ¹² for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.
- ¹³ And this until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Ephesians 4:1-16 (NIV)

- ¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
- ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;
- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- ⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.
- ⁸ This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people."
- ⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?
- ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)
- ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,
- ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up
- ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

¹⁴ so that we no longer may be infants, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, in the dishonesty of men, in cunning craftiness, to the wiles of deceit.

¹⁵ But that you, speaking the truth in love, may in all things grow up to Him who is the Head, even Christ;

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, fitted together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of each part, producing the growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love.

¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Video: Electrical Grid 101: All you need to know!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbPmsBmo03Y>

The video describes how electrical grids function. If transmission of the Good News worked like an electrical grid, where do you see yourself in the process?

LESSON CONTEXT

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul encourages the Ephesian believers to “walk worthy of the calling with which you are called.” Having been called into the body of Christ, they have also been commissioned and equipped to build up the church. One of the key answers as to how they would be able to do this is found in this week’s Gospel reading: John 15:4-5:

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Believers are branches in the vine. To be fruitful in service for God the Father, you need to stay connected to the vine.

EXAMINING THE STORY

If we think of remaining connected to Christ in modern terminology, we might think of it as staying connected to a power grid. When you or I are connected, we have power flowing through us to make us effective/fruitful in the task He gives to each of us. Without the power source, we can do nothing. Jesus said “apart from me you can do nothing.” To be effective (fruitful) for God, we must stay connected to the grid (vine).

In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul reminds the church that God has called them out of the darkness of their old life. He has given them new life in Jesus Christ. They

should live lives that are worthy of the calling they received. They should be humble and gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love. By walking in humility, gentleness, and patience, believers emulate Christ, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, and are accorded as blessed (Galatians 5:22-23, Matthew 5, Philippians 4:7-8). As a result of these three virtues, love for one another is the natural by-product (1 Corinthians 13). Further, they should make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

The lesson story emphasizes the unity of Christ, as there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. Again, the writer of Ephesians highlights the triune Godhead in God the Father, Son, and Spirit; each being a part of the unified and divine plan for the family of faith. When Christ called the church, He also gave them work to do - He commissioned it. Not only do believers have new life, but they are given Christ’s resurrection power through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we stay connected to the vine/grid we have the power to be witnesses that draw others to Christ.

As noted in our opening, a power grid has three main steps: generation, transmission, and consumption. In Ephesians 4:7-8, we find that Christ is our generator who grants us access to our power through the gift of His grace. These verses outline:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men (KJV)

This verse makes reference to Psalm 68:18:

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them (KJV)

Psalm 68, a hymn of praise, is associated with David. It begins in song, referencing the Song of Ark from Moses in Numbers 10:35-36; this song would have been sung in times of war with the Lord enthroned on the ark leading the people (Harper Collins Study Bible, Footnote Psalm 68.1-3). The psalmist praises God for His continued presence from giving the law

on Mount Sinai and giving victory over the kings of Canaan, with verse 18 declaring God ascended on the high mountain, receiving gifts of men.

In contrast, Ephesians 4:7-8 declares we receive the gift of grace through Jesus Christ, granting us access to the grid. Further, upon Jesus ascending victoriously, He granted additional gifts to assist us in staying connected to the grid in the form of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These gifted men and women are equipped to help strengthen the other members of Christ's body, the church. Through these complementary gifts of grace and leaders, Jesus made provision for His people to grow in unity and build the Body in love.

BREAKTHROUGH

- 1 I wonder how power flows through me and builds up others in the church as one connected to the spiritual grid.

- 2 I wonder what the church would be like if we all spent more time building each other up.
- 3 I wonder what I can do to be more effective in building up the church.

LIFE APPLICATION

In our opening video, power grids were noted to have three steps: generation, transmission, and consumption. Reflecting on these three steps, consider some actions that can be taken to greater facilitate transmission of God's word on the spiritual grid.

GOING OUT

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is quite clear. The same Christ Jesus, who hung bled and died for our sins, gives us resurrection power to do His will. We will be fruitful in whatever He assigns us to do if we stay connected to Him. Stay connected to the grid.

PRAYER

Gracious Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that You are able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

Not only have you saved us, but You have also equipped us to do the work of the church. Please help us to stay connected to Christ so that His resurrection power will flow through us and we will be fruitful in all that You have for us to do. Unto You be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Aug
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2021

Lesson 9:

INVISIBLE ARMOR

Lesson Story: Ephesians 6:10-20 | Gospel Reading: Matthew 10:28-31

Ephesians 6:10-20 (KJV)

¹⁰Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. ¹¹Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. ¹³Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

¹⁸Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; ¹⁹And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Ephesians 6:10-20 (Amplified Bible)

¹⁰In conclusion, be strong in the Lord [draw your strength from Him and be empowered through your union with Him] and in the power of His [boundless] might. ¹¹Put on the full armor of God [for His precepts are like the splendid armor of a heavily-armed soldier], so that you may be able to [successfully] stand up against all the schemes and the strategies and the deceits of the devil. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly (supernatural) places. ¹³Therefore, put on the complete armor of God, so that you will be able to [successfully] resist and stand your ground in the evil day [of danger], and having done everything [that the crisis demands], to stand firm [in your place, fully prepared, immovable, victorious]. ¹⁴So stand firm and hold your ground, **HAVING TIGHTENED THE WIDE BAND OF TRUTH** (personal integrity, moral courage) **AROUND YOUR WAIST** and **HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** (an upright heart), ¹⁵and having strapped on **YOUR FEET THE GOSPEL OF PEACE IN PREPARATION** [to face the enemy with firm-footed stability and the readiness produced by the good news]. ¹⁶Above all, lift up the [protective] shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

¹⁸With all prayer and petition pray [with specific requests] at all times [on every occasion and in every season] in the Spirit, and with this in view, stay alert with all perseverance and petition [interceding in prayer] for all God's people. ¹⁹And pray for me, that words may be given to me when I open my mouth, to proclaim boldly the mystery of the good news [of salvation], ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. And pray that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly and courageously, as I should.

What is your physical response to the story?

What is your emotional response to the story?

What are the key terms, phrases, and numbers?

Re-create the story through an outline, image, poem, lyrics, or any other medium inspired.

How do you imagine or how has the story actually been told among different groups?

How did you read or how have you traditionally read, interpreted, and been presented the story?

OPENING

Video: The Armor of God: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mawX1wFJZN4>

Why do you think the six pieces of armor are outlined?

What pieces would you add to the armor based on your experience fighting spiritual battles?

LESSON CONTEXT

Theologians do not describe Saul as a man of great strength or stature. He is believed to have been small, but extremely well studied, highly intelligent, and someone whose greatest weapon likely lied in his ability to articulate those strengths through words rather than deeds. Acts 9:1 says that he breathed “threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord.” It was with his words he frightened, with his words he threatened, and with his words, as well as actions, he took life.

In Ephesians 6, Paul’s use of the imagery of weapons invokes his strength with words to convey that there is a fight, a daily fight, a constant fight between our will and God’s will, pursuit of His holiness or submission to the pleasures of our flesh, the ways of the world or the power of His righteousness. If we do not daily arm ourselves with the truth of God’s power, His word, and His righteousness, and hold fast to our faith, then not only do we put ourselves at a disadvantage in our daily war between the spirit and the flesh, but we also hinder the power with which we are able to share the gospel of God’s good news.

EXAMINING THE STORY

On August 20, 2013, a 20-year old young man walked into an elementary school with an AK-47 assault rifle and 500 rounds of ammunition, preparing to commit a heinous act that would cause irreparable harm. Several minutes before that young man would walk into the school, a staff member onsite by the name of Antoinette Tuff received a devastating phone call leaving her in tears, crying

out to God “Help me!” There was no way she could have prepared herself for what she would face next. Yet, somehow, she was. She would come face to face with that young man and his rifle, and the two would engage in a conversation that would ultimately save her life and the lives of those he would have targeted had he not surrendered his weapon.

During the conversation, she watched him load his weapon, fire it, and was gripped with fear as at least one of the bullets from the rounds that he fired ricocheted in a room where only she and the gunman stood. Through it all she managed to minister to him, to tell him of her own personal pain, and to share a little bit of her faith.

“...be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

— Ephesians 6:10

In her own strength, Antoinette had nothing left to give. She was having a very rough day, likely already feeling defeated, yet somehow she managed to have surpassing victory.

After this event became national news, there were many headlines hailing Antoinette and calling her a hero. Her response, “No, I’m a vessel.” She shared how she prayed throughout the entire ordeal asking God what He would have her to say to the young man. How was it that she was equipped for a battle that she didn’t know was coming and that required a strength greater than her own?

“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand...”

— Ephesians 6:11

On August 20th, Antoinette’s faith would literally serve as her shield and by displaying God’s righteousness through her love and empathy for that young man; she would convince him to disarm and saved countless lives, which was a victory that no physical weapon could have guaranteed.

Like Antoinette, we also must put on the full armor. In the lesson, the author admonishes that we must put on the armor of God to be able to stand three times (verses 11, 13, 14). He outlines our battle is not one of physical nature, our battle is against

principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore, there are six pieces of articles highlighted for spiritual warfare: the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes with preparation for the gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and sword of the Spirit, or the word of God. Of these six articles, the sword is the only weapon in the armor, indicating the only weapon we need in spiritual battle is the word of God.

In addition to putting on the full armor, believers are directed to have a prayer life. The lesson story details this prayer life by first stating we ought to pray in the Spirit, requiring alignment of our prayers with God's will. We should pray incessantly, and a healthy prayer life will contain both prayers and supplications. Further, our prayers should not be limited to our own lives, but also include prayers for the saints and for our leaders to have the boldness in carrying forth the gospel.

Thus, in the final peroration, or appeal, the writer of Ephesus tells believers to put on the whole armor of God and to pray. Paul's words to the church in Ephesus ring just as true to the church of today. It is not easy to choose righteousness in a world full of those who do otherwise. It is hard to love those who have hurt us, to choose kind words when someone has cut us with theirs, and to choose peace over anger when we feel that we are justified in our emotions.

It is easier to give into the flesh, to say and do what we please when we please, but as children of God adopted into the family of faith through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are called to do the hard work. Paul says in Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." As recipients of God's gift of salvation and followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to no longer live for ourselves but for the higher calling God has placed upon us. For how can we know the hope of His calling if we are unwilling to fully submit to the call?

BREAKTHROUGH

- 1 I wonder what we can do to prepare ourselves to respond with the weapons God has provided for us instead of relying on our own strength when faced with a trial or attack from the enemy.
- 2 I wonder if there is a worldly weapon you have at your disposal (such your words, thoughts, fear, or other defense mechanisms) that you struggle with putting down and allowing God to replace with His own artillery.
- 3 I wonder if you can identify someone that you've witnessed experience victory in a challenging situation because they chose to fight in the spirit instead using a worldly weapon.
- 4 I wonder if you can think of a time when you chose a spiritual weapon of warfare and saw God bring victory to your situation.

LIFE APPLICATION

Watch the video (This Lady Is A Hero: School Shooter Taken Down By Bookkeeper Antoinette Tuff Interview! | Video (<https://worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshh95yT536eTf5jI3P7>), and discuss the following:

- Identify ways in which the video relates to today's lesson.
- Share a time where you utilized a spiritual weapon of warfare and saw God bring victory to your situation.

GOING OUT

2 Corinthians 10:4 says:

"The weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood]. Our weapons are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

Living in a world of constant physical wars of all kind, it can be easy to forget that we have access to an entire arsenal, which guarantees us victory over anything we might face. God has given us the necessary spiritual armor and weaponry to withstand any attack and win victory over every

circumstance, but our armor is not automatic. It must be donned daily.

Paul was adamant in his plea to the church at Ephesus both because he loved them and because he understood that making the choice to pattern one's life after the model set by Jesus Christ would require sacrifice, but he also knew that it came with a guarantee of hope. He prayed "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power

toward us who believe..." Ephesians 1:18-19 (New American Standard Bible)

It is a prayer that rings just as true today as the day he wrote it over 2,000 years ago while living out a trying exemplification of such a sacrifice as a prisoner in a Roman jail. Let us also pray that as we submit to our collective and individual calls as followers of Christ, that the eyes of our understanding will be enlightened and that we will experience both the power and the hope that comes with trusting in God and living according to His righteousness.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to remember to daily don ourselves in the full armor that You have provided for us, empowering us to withstand anything that we may face from one day to another. Help us to rely on the power of Your might instead of our own strength come what may. Thank you for equipping us with everything that we need to pursue and live out Your calling in and through our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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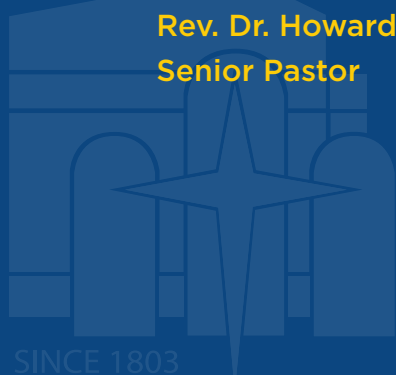
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parents went to Jerusalem every year at the
five years old, they went up to Jerusalem accor
ished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus
mother did not know it; ⁴⁴ but supposing Him
ney, and sought Him among their relatives and
y returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. ⁴⁶ Now so
the temple, sitting in the midst of the teacher
And all who heard Him were astonished at Him
n, they were amazed; and His mother said to H
r father and I have sought You anxiously." Him
st of the Passover. ⁴² And when He was tak
the custom of the feast. ⁴³ When they had finis