WORD AFLAME

JR. HIGH

Summer 2020 • Teacher's Manual • Grades 7-9

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING ***THE FOUR "GIVES"*** OF FORGIVENESS

YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT LIES **BENEATH** *THESE WATERS*

UTILIZE THESE TOOLS TO EXPAND YOUR ***SOCIAL MEDIA*** PRESENCE

WORD AFLAME CURRICULUM

Word Aflame Jr. High

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Editorial

by Evan Zenobia
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Normally I don't particularly hone in on and discuss the content that we will be teaching this quarter, but this quarter's content felt different to me. With the pervasive nature of social media and its role in just about everything that we, and our students do, it is important that we understand the power of social media and the relationships it creates. We have no way of knowing just how influenced our students are by the media they consume on a minute-by-minute basis and how it affects everything from their spiritual life to their behaviors to their social relationships. Every time we step into the classroom, we are walking into a mysterious atmosphere of influence. Those students are drastically different than they were just days earlier. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to discern how we can reach them here and now, before the content they are consuming gets a hold of them.

Social media is a wonderful tool when used correctly, and if we spend our time educating our students and our students' parents, we can be incredibly effective in our role. When we approach every teaching period as an opportunity to spiritually enforce good habits, especially on social media, we may be making an impact greater than we could know. Treat every class like a war zone; come anointed and studied and open to what God has been talking to you about, because you may just save your students' lives from the next media trend that threatens their souls. I am proud of what each of you do every day. Thank you for making the education and eternal souls of this generation a priority.

This quarter will focus on forgiveness and its impact on our lifestyle when we overcome harboring feelings against others. We will also be exploring the story of Jonah and its connection to the themes of God's love and forgiveness even in spite of our mistakes. This will lead us into the third series and our focus on the social aspect of sharing the gospel, loving people, and using practical tools to reach the lost.

The Gear Icon: This icon denotes a suggested time for discussion or student/teacher input.

The Pencil Icon: This icon denotes a specific answer to a question within the student handbook or other student writing prompt.

The PowerPoint Icon: This icon denotes the use of the designated item within the PowerPoint slides provided with the lesson such as fill-in-the-blank answers or Bible verses.

Bold Font: This font indicates a major point that is also in the PowerPoint and student handbook.

Italicized Font: This font indicates a note for the teacher or a word that is being defined.

CUSTOMIZE THE CURRICULUM

Digital resources for both the teacher's manual and the teacher's resource packet (TRP) are available through access codes. The Jr. High Teacher's Manual is available as PDF and DOC documents that can be customized to fit your teaching style, classroom setting, and schedule. Cut and paste, edit material out of or into the lesson, and make it your own using the following instructions.

Digital Resources

To access the PDF and DOCs of the teacher's manual online:

1. Visit **pentecostalpublishing.com/downloads** and follow the instructions to access digital resources.
2. Use the download code: **TNsu20SweetTeaTM**.

The coupon code will be valid for one year from the date of the first lesson.

Teacher's Resource Packet Digital Resources

To access the reproducible items from the resource packet (TRP), see the resource packet instruction sheet. If you have not purchased a packet, you can do so by going to www.pentecostalpublishing.com or calling 866-819-7667.

NOTE: Not all lessons offer digital resources.

Theme Development

Series 1: Forgiveness

- This unit explores the importance of forgiveness and how it can affect our spiritual walk and eternity.
- The big theme of this unit is giving and as such it may be hard to nail down a decorative theme. Instead, I would suggest the use of individual objects for each lesson or props connected to a personal story that you relate to forgiveness, mercy, or grace. Draw from personal experiences and be transparent, showing your students symbols and objects that represent what forgiveness looked like in your own life.
- Consider the use of the Teachers Resource Packet (TRP) if props and settings are not possible.

Series 2: Into the Depths

- This unit explores the story of Jonah and the depths to which God's love and forgiveness for us runs.
- Consider the use of nautical or deep sea imagery and lighting. Anything and everything that you relate to the ocean can be used as a prop or decoration for this unit.
- Consider the use of costumes to engage students as well. This could be through the use of scuba gear, pool floaties, rain slicker, or even a fake beard and a captains hat. Even though this may not be directly related to the lessons, it may help to give students an anchoring memory by which to recall what they learned in class.

Series 3: Get Social

- This unit explores the dangers of social media, while also looking at the benefits when it is used for relationship and evangelism.
- Consider the use of students' posts and pictures from their social media accounts. You could create a large collage of their photos, or even hilariously frame tweets or posts like some sort of art exhibit.
- Consider the use of the Teachers Resource Packet (TRP) if props and settings are not possible.

Embark: This opening section is meant to elicit discussion and promote activity to encourage the learning process of students while creating a fun and engaging atmosphere.

Explore: This section is the basis for the lesson with various biblical references, key points, as well as personal examples to effectively convey the big idea in a logical and practical manner.

Expand: This section is intended to provide a consolidated yet effective means of closure perpetuated by closing discussions, activities, or prayers.

Lesson 1
Give Yourself a Second Chance
Week of June 7, 2020

Biblical Passage
Romans 8:1; I John 1:9

Bible Point
Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is yourself. We expect perfection out of ourselves, and when we miss the mark, we often punish ourselves. This lesson illustrates how to let go of our shortcomings and embrace Jesus' forgiveness.

Supplies
Pens; *optional:* stopwatch; *optional:* index cards (1 per student)

Note to Teacher: In preparing for this lesson, consider studying David Shatwell's sermon "The Tragedy of a Wounded Spirit," available on YouTube. In it, he explains steps of forgiveness in additional detail beyond what is covered in these lessons.

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

Unit Aim: One of the hardest things Christians must do is learn to forgive. It is completely contrary to our humanity, yet Jesus tells us if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. In this unit we will study how to let go of hurts and hang-ups as we discuss four "gives" of forgiveness.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. How would you define the word *forgiveness*?
3. Would you say forgiveness is easy? Why or why not?
4. Is it ever okay to choose not to forgive? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever had trouble forgiving yourself for something you did wrong? Why or why not?

B. Option 2 — It's Natural

1. *Share the following joke with the class.*
   a. A young lady walks into a beauty salon to get her hair fixed for a wedding. The stylist remarks, "What beautiful blonde hair!"
   b. "Thank you," the young lady replies, running her hand through her hair. "It's natural."
   c. Later a brunette walks in for the same reason. The stylist remarks, "What gorgeous brown hair!"
   d. "Thank you," the young lady replies, running her hand through her hair. "It's natural."
   e. Later still a young lady with green hair walks in. The stylist remarks, "What unique green hair!"
   f. "Thank you," the young lady replies, running her hand over her nose and through her hair. "It's natural."
2. *Transition Statement*: There are many things about living for Jesus that simply are not natural. In fact, our human nature is often our biggest obstacle in furthering our Christian walk. In this unit we will explore one of those unnatural things we are called to: forgiveness.

Explore

A. Introduction to the Series

1. Many things about living for Jesus are simply not natural. In fact, **our human nature is often our greatest obstacle when it comes to moving forward in our Christian walk.**

a. There is nothing natural about denying ourselves. If you don't believe me, set a bowl of candy out and try not to eat any all week long.
b. There is nothing natural about taking up your cross. Very few people will intentionally pick a path they know will result in pain.
c. There is nothing natural about following Jesus. Truthfully, our human nature does not want to follow anyone other than ourselves.

2. We will spend the next four weeks on a topic that is very unnatural; we will discuss forgiveness.
   a. The dictionary defines the word *forgive* in very simple terms. **It means "to cancel a debt."**
   b. I cannot say I have forgiven someone if I still harbor offenses and attempt to collect on that person's debt. If there is any portion of the debt I still require to be repaid, then it has not been fully canceled; forgiveness has not truly been offered.
   c. It may be easy to say, "I forgive," but it is difficult to live out that forgiveness. Yet we know we must live it out if we are to be like Jesus. After all, Jesus is love, and I Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love "thinketh no evil."
3. Forgiveness is most difficult because it digs up buried emotions and pulls out pain that we have pushed away to the back of the closet. Like a clam, we are convinced if we bury that irritation long enough, we can smooth it all into a pearl and everything will be alright. However, unlike a clam, our wounds just fester. They become more and more infected until wounded emotions turn into a wounded spirit.
4. Even though we are not naturally inclined to forgive, we cannot be spiritually healthy without extending forgiveness. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). If we do not offer forgiveness, we cannot expect to receive forgiveness.
5. Notice the root word of forgiveness is *give*. In this unit we will discuss the four "gives" of forgiveness. We will begin by discussing the importance of giving yourself a second chance.

B. The Weight of Conscience

1. *Read Romans 8:1; I John 1:9.*
2. Have you ever done something wrong and not gotten caught? It would seem like a blessing, but it often becomes a curse.
   a. It weighs on your conscience.
   b. If you wronged a person, every time you are around that person, you are on pins and needles.
   c. It can dominate your thoughts.
3. Dave Frey, of the band Sidewalk Prophets, once told the story behind what inspired him to write the song "You Love Me Anyway." He said the following:
   a. "The background of the first verse comes from a real-life

experience I had as a kid. I loved aquariums and owned a goldfish. One day my parents were out and left me and my friend with a babysitter. I decided to play with my goldfish, named Mortimer, and I accidentally killed it. My babysitter seemed to have a danger radar and sensed something went wrong and asked who murdered the fish? I lied and blamed my friend Joel, and to my surprise, he took the blame for me.

b. "The next Sunday, I felt terribly guilty for blaming my friend, and I knew I had sinned. In church I sat in the balcony and started sobbing uncontrollably for what I had done, and I told my mom I was sorry for hurting her and for hurting Jesus. She smiled and said, 'It's okay; Jesus loves you no matter what you've done.' So this song is about me and how I sometimes feel like the lowest of all, but I know Jesus loves me anyway. It was there in that silly, little lie that I began to realize the power of grace. Faults and downfalls will occur, and the true measure of a man or a boy is what we do after those moments." (Source: *NewsRelease Today*)

4. Isn't it amazing how the slightest misstep can bring guilt crashing down on us?

C. The Hardest Person to Forgive

1. **Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is <u>yourself</u>.**
   a. Why? We expect more out of ourselves. We often require ourselves to be perfect.
   b. Unfortunately, that is lofty and unattainable. Scripture calls us to turn from sin and live transformed lives (Romans 6:4), but Scripture also recognizes there is a maturing process (II Peter 3:18). We do not get there overnight.
2. Not forgiving ourselves does not have to involve something big; in fact, it often doesn't. We play the smallest missteps over and over again in our minds until they feel absolutely monumental.
3. One unwholesome thought, a little moment of unrestrained anger, an overindulgence—all can lead us to believe we have severed all connections with Jesus.

D. Diagnosing a Lack of Self-Forgiveness

1. A symptom that commonly shows up when we do not forgive ourselves is depression.
2. **<u>Depression</u> can be described as anger turned inward.** We are frustrated with ourselves for our lack of perfection.
3. We often continue to punish ourselves and get trapped in a cycle of shame.

Activity — Don't Hold Your Breath

1. *Hold a competition to see who can hold his or her breath the longest. You may want to use a stopwatch.*
2. Some of us can hold our breath for a long time, but we cannot hold our breath forever. Why? Because we need oxygen to live.
3. *The Point:* Perhaps we can try to press on, carrying guilt with us for a while, but eventually the guilt will suffocate us. We need to breathe in the oxygen of forgiveness to live the way Jesus wants us to live.

E. No Condemnation

1. There is a major problem with punishing ourselves. As we read earlier in Romans 8:1, Jesus does not condemn us for our moments of shortcomings. **As soon as He forgives us, He <u>forgets</u> our mistakes ever happened** (Hebrews 8:12).
2. If our holy, wise, sovereign Savior chooses to forgive us, how can we feel justified not forgiving ourselves?
3. Our human nature does not want forgiveness; it wants the offense to be made right.
4. So how do we give ourselves a second chance?

F. Truly Repent of Failure

1. Repentance is not just telling Jesus we are sorry; repentance is also making up our minds not to intentionally participate in that form of unrighteousness again.
2. **When we repent, we are not just looking away from sin; we are <u>turning</u> away from sin**.

G. Accept Jesus' Forgiveness

1. *Read I John 1:9.*
2. Notice the verse says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us." We often think of justice as paying for our sins, but Jesus already paid for them on the cross. To not accept His sacrifice would be unjust.
   a. Have the guilt and shame of your sin ever felt so overwhelming that you were embarrassed to confess it to Jesus? This is not uncommon.
   b. Ultimately, the enemy of our souls wants to do all he can to prevent us from turning to Jesus when we fall.
3. **If the devil can <u>shame</u> us into not seeking forgiveness, he has already won**. Let's push through and confess our sins anyway.

H. Trust That We Are Forgiven

1. **Forgiveness is an <u>action</u>, not an emotion**.
2. Jesus will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. We do not have to earn His mercy; we couldn't, even if we tried.
3. Sometimes it is difficult to separate how we feel from what we know. We may know intellectually that Jesus has forgiven our sins, but to

accept it as true when we do not feel forgiven is difficult at best.

4. We may feel we are not truly repentant unless we are miserable over our failures, but that is not Jesus' plan for us.

I. Let Go; Let God

1. If you are holding yourself accountable for past failings, stop.
2. Embrace the mercy and grace Jesus has for you.
3. Forgive yourself; give yourself a second chance.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Have a time of prayer, encouraging students to confess their sins to Jesus so He can forgive them.*
2. *If there are students who have never received the Holy Ghost, pray with them.*

B. Option 2 — Tear It Up and Start Over

1. *Hand each student a pen and an index card. Instruct students to write down anything for which they have been struggling to forgive themselves.*
2. *As a sign of forgiving themselves, once they have written on their cards, instruct them to tear the cards up and throw them in the trash.*

Lesson 2
Give Grace
Week of June 14, 2020

Unit Aim: One of the hardest things Christians must do is learn to forgive. It is completely contrary to our humanity, yet Jesus tells us if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. In this unit we will study how to let go of hurts and hang-ups as we discuss four "gives" of forgiveness.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. "To err is human; to forgive, divine." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever struggled to forgive someone? Why or why not?
4. What are some things that can make forgiveness difficult?
5. Have you ever experienced a time when someone chose not to forgive you? How did that make you feel?

B. Option 2 — Examining Forgiveness

1. *Perform an internet search for the lyrics to the song "Forgiveness" by Matthew West. Print a copy of the lyrics for each student.*
2. *Play the song and encourage students to think about the lyrics as the song plays.*
3. *Ask the following questions:*
   a. The first verse says, forgiveness "always goes to those who don't deserve." Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
   b. The second verse says, "It's the whisper in your ear saying set it free." How does forgiveness set free?
   c. The chorus says, "Show me how to love the unlovable." What are some ways we can show grace to the people in our lives who are difficult to love?

Explore

A. Review

1. Many things about living for Jesus are simply not natural. Forgiveness is one of those things, but it is also necessary in our Christian walk.
2. The dictionary defines the word *forgive* in very simple terms. It means "to cancel a debt."
3. I cannot say I have forgiven someone if I still harbor offenses and attempt to collect on that person's debt. If there is any portion of the debt

Biblical Passage
Matthew 18:23–35

Bible Point
We can forgive others by extending Jesus' grace to them, even if we feel they do not deserve it.

Supplies
Pens, ball, marker, masking tape, music; *optional:* paper; *optional:* copies of the lyrics to the song *Forgiveness* by Matthew West

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

I still require to be repaid, then it has not been fully canceled; forgiveness has not truly been offered.

4. The first (and often hardest) person to forgive is yourself. We feel the weight of our mistakes, and we believe we should be punished, so we punish ourselves. Yet Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins.
5. Jesus already canceled the debt for us on Calvary, so the only just thing He can do is forgive us. In turn, we need to embrace His forgiveness.

B. Lessons from the Unmerciful Servant

1. *Read Matthew 18:23–35.*
   a. We, sinful humanity, have a tremendous need for forgiveness.
   b. We can only receive that forgiveness from Jesus.
   c. **When Jesus forgives us, His forgiveness is <u>total</u>.**
   d. Because we have been forgiven so completely, Jesus requires the same forgiveness from us.
2. Remember that even if we have to forgive someone for several things, it pales in comparison to the lifetime of sin from which we need forgiveness through Jesus.
3. If we are faithful to forgive others of the instances when they wrong us, we can be confident Jesus will forgive us.
4. If we withhold forgiveness, though, we are at risk of Jesus withholding forgiveness from us too.

C. Forgiveness Matters to Jesus

1. Jesus is very serious about forgiveness. In addition to the parable we read, He spent a good portion of the Sermon on the Mount on the subject. He talked about it frequently in the Gospels, and we frequently see His forgiveness on display:
   a. We see it with the woman caught in the act of adultery.
   b. We see it at Zacchaeus's house.
   c. We see it when Jesus took His final breath on the cross.
   d. We see it in how Jesus dealt with Peter after the Resurrection.
2. We can learn a few things from each of these scenarios.
   a. There was a very clear offense.
      (1) These offenses were not just things that were invented or blown out of proportion.
      (2) Real, legitimate hurt was involved.
   b. There was a debt to be paid.
      (1) In each scenario, the offender owed something.
      (2) Retribution could have been expected and certainly would have been appropriate.
   c. Most important, though, **there was no excuse for not extending <u>grace</u>.**
      (1) We find no examples in the Gospels where Jesus permitted an excuse for unforgiveness.

(2) Even on the cross, when His accusers sneered, mocked, and refused to offer an apology, Jesus still forgave.

3. We see this command to forgive clearly in Jesus' response to Peter's question in Matthew 18:21–22. Jesus' point was not that we must forgive 490 times. Rather, His point was to always forgive.
4. Our only option when we have been wronged, then, is to forgive. There are no exceptions; we simply forgive.
   a. Forgiving someone does not mean that what the person did was okay; it means we are releasing the offense so we are not bound by unforgiveness.
   b. In instances of abuse and related matters, we still consult the proper authorities and follow appropriate measures. Depending on the nature of the offense, we may not reconcile with the person.
   c. **Forgiveness, however, is a <u>spiritual</u> decision**; we place the issue in Jesus' hands, allowing Him to heal the hurt.
   d. Even in instances of abuse where forgiveness is not an easy process, we commit to working through it, even if it means multiple times a day we ask Jesus to help us forgive.

D. Forgiveness and Grace

1. We call it forgiveness, but we are really extending grace.
2. What is *grace*? The dictionary defines it as "the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings."
3. When I extend grace, what am I doing?
   a. I am offering it freely. I am not making excuses. I am just giving it away.
   b. I am offering unmerited favor. The term *unmerited* means "unearned." Even though someone does not have a right to my favor, I extend it anyway.
   c. I am offering a window to salvation. I am demonstrating the love of Christ, so I can connect someone to Him.
4. I am offering and receiving blessings. **Forgiveness itself is a <u>blessing</u>**.

Activity — Don't Hold a Grudge

1. *Before class, purchase a ball and write on it: Grudge. Cover the word with masking tape so it cannot be seen. Optional: write the word on a piece of paper and ball it up.*
2. *Have students form a circle. Play an old-fashioned game of Hot Potato by playing music and passing the ball. After the game, peel back the tape or unwad the paper ball to reveal the word: Grudge.*
3. *The Point*: Jesus does not want us to carry grudges around. It only ends up hurting us in the end. We need to give away those grudges through forgiveness.
4. Let's talk more about why Jesus requires forgiveness.

E. Why Forgiveness?

1. Why would Jesus require forgiveness from us? He, of all beings, understands just how difficult it can be. What reasoning is there behind Him being so unwavering on the subject?
   a. Grace is how others find Jesus.
      (1) When we show grace to others, we become ambassadors of Jesus Christ in their lives.
      (2) We are demonstrating His love and mercy, and we are showing them just how desperately Jesus wants a relationship with them.
   b. Grace is how we found Jesus.
      (1) Christianity, by definition, is a journey to become more like Jesus Christ.
      (2) If His grace is what attracted us at the beginning, it stands to reason that we must allow that same grace to be perfected in our lives.
   c. **Jesus wants the <u>best</u> for us.**
      (1) Jesus wants us to be whole and healthy.
      (2) Jesus knows that unforgiveness can lead to bitterness and serious spiritual and even physical problems.
2. As we discussed last week, symptoms in our lives can show us where we lack forgiveness. When it comes to forgiving others, the symptom of withholding forgiveness from them is bitterness.

F. Examining Bitterness

1. It has rightly been said, "Bitterness is the poison you swallow hoping it kills someone else."
2. Some may say, "I'm not bitter; I'm just hurt." Are you sure? Ask yourself these questions:
   a. How often do I think about the offense?
   b. Do I get angry when the person's name is brought up or when the person walks into the room?
   c. Do I intentionally find ways to avoid interacting with the person?
   d. Do I get jealous or irritated when the person experiences success or blessings?
   e. Do I fantasize about getting even with the person?
3. So how do we prevent bitterness? How do we forgive someone who has wronged us, particularly if the wound is deep?

G. Let Go of the Pain

1. There is nothing simple about this, but it is possible. **We must give Jesus <u>access</u> to our pain and let Him deal with it.**
2. We must get alone with Jesus and get emotionally raw with Him, telling Him (in extreme detail) exactly what happened and exactly how it made us feel.

a. Tell Jesus, "I am releasing this pain to You, and I do not ever want to carry it again."
b. Do this as many times as necessary to get a complete release from the pain.

H. Recall All We Have Been Forgiven

1. **We may feel we have never wronged someone as deeply as we have been wronged, but that is not true; we have wronged Jesus even more deeply.**
2. Jesus paid the price for our sins. If we measured how much someone else has wronged us against how much we have wronged Jesus, the scale would not tip in our favor.
3. What did you do to cost Jesus His life on the cross?

I. Choose to Forgive

1. Remember, forgiveness is not an emotion; it is an action.
2. We do not have to feel like forgiving someone to choose to forgive that person.
3. Forgiveness does not have to be earned; it is simply offered. Trust, though, must be earned. We do not have to wait until we trust someone again to forgive that person.

J. Express Forgiveness

1. Although it is not always possible, we should pray and ask the Lord if it is appropriate for us to go to the person who wronged us and express forgiveness.
2. **Forgiving someone sets us free, and the person being forgiven is set free as well.**

K. Forgiveness Freely Offered

1. In Matthew 10:8, as Jesus was sending out His disciples to do His work, He said, "Freely ye have received, freely give."
2. We have freely received His grace, His mercy, and His love. We must extend these just as freely.
3. If you are holding a grudge today, stop. Let go and let God have it.
4. Extend the same grace to others that Jesus offered to you. Give others grace, and you will see how it multiplies in your life.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Pray with students for God to help them let go of the pain inflicted by others.*
2. *Encourage them to recount the story to Jesus as they pray and then ask His help to forgive the person who hurt them.*
3. *Pray that Jesus will help them show grace to others, no matter the circumstance.*

B. Option 2 — Graceful Skits

1. *Form groups of two or three.*
2. *Give each group one of the following scenarios (or make up your own). Each group should act out how to demonstrate grace in the given situation.*
   a. You catch someone cheating off your test.
   b. Your brother or sister steals something out of your room.
   c. You find out a classmate has been spreading rumors about you on social media.
   d. You are teased by a group of people who don't like your hairstyle or outfit.

Lesson 3

Give Others a Clean Slate

Week of June 21, 2020

Unit Aim: One of the hardest things Christians must do is learn to forgive. It is completely contrary to our humanity, yet Jesus tells us if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. In this unit we will study how to let go of hurts and hang-ups as we discuss four "gives" of forgiveness.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Have you ever heard the phrase "forgive and forget"? Is this possible? Why or why not?
3. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. The definition of the word *forgive* is "to cancel a debt." How do you cancel someone's debt against you?
5. Can you completely forgive someone if you still expect that person to make it right? Why or why not?

B. Option 2 — Payback

1. *For this activity, you will need play money one-dollar bills.*
2. *Give each student two to four play money dollars. Tell students that they each owe you five dollars, and they must try to secure enough money from others in the class to pay you back. They can secure it by any non-violent means they would like (e.g., bartering, selling something, convincing, and so on).*
3. *After a few minutes, ask the following questions:*
   a. Was anyone able to secure five dollars? If so, how did you do it?
   b. We have been talking about forgiveness, defined as canceling a debt. Do we forgive others when we choose not to "cancel their debt" against us? Why or why not?

Explore

A. Review

1. Many things about living for Jesus are simply not natural. Forgiveness is one of those things, but it is also necessary in our Christian walk.
2. The dictionary defines the word *forgive* in very simple terms. It means "to cancel a debt."

Biblical Passage

Luke 18:1–7; 23:34

Bible Point

The pain we experience when another person wrongs us may never fully leave our memory, but we see from Jesus' example on the cross that we have an obligation to let go of our right to get even. In this lesson we will explore how to release others from their responsibility to make things right toward us.

Supplies

Pens, stopwatch, weights (dumbbells or other items of various weights); *optional:* play money; optional: helium-filled balloons, markers

Legend:

PowerPoint Slide

Student Handbook

Activity

3. I cannot say I have forgiven someone if I still harbor offenses and attempt to collect on that person's debt. If there is any portion of the debt I still require to be repaid, then it has not been fully canceled; forgiveness has not truly been offered.
4. The first (and often hardest) person to forgive is yourself. We feel the weight of our mistakes, and we believe we should be punished, so we punish ourselves. Yet Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins, so we should embrace His forgiveness.
5. Last week we talked about the difficulty of forgiving others. Remember, forgiveness is something we offer, and it often goes to those who deserve it the least. If we do not forgive others, though, Scripture plainly tells us we will not find forgiveness for ourselves either.

B. Forgive and Forget

1. Today we will talk about going a step beyond simply expressing forgiveness. We will talk about releasing the people we have forgiven.
2. We have all heard the phrase "forgive and forget." Well, there is a problem with this; that is not how the human brain works.
   a. In a study titled "How Trauma Impacts the Brain," Theresa Burke, PhD, noted that a traumatic memory essentially remains stuck in the areas of the brain that control the non-verbal, non-conscious, and sub-cortical regions.
   b. These areas are not accessible to the frontal lobes, which control understanding, thinking, and reasoning.
   c. In other words, **our brains never really <u>forget</u> when we have been wronged**. Rather, our brains keep a copy of that memory and bury it deep within our subconscious.
3. All our actions, then, could be symptomatic of that trauma, and we may not even be aware of it.

C. The Truth about Hurt

1. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." The problem with this statement is that it is not true; words do hurt.
2. While sticks and stones may injure the physical body, we can heal and move on from that pain. Words, though, can cut all the way down to the soul. They may not wound the body, but they can wound the spirit.
3. The recovery process for this can be much more lengthy and difficult. It takes genuine commitment to get past it.
4. **When someone <u>wrongs</u> us or <u>hurts</u> us, our natural inclination is toward retribution**. We want the person to pay for the crime against us. This sounds like justice, but it often stretches beyond the borders of justice into retaliation.

D. Lessons from the Parable of the Unjust Judge

1. *Read Luke 18:1–7.*
2. The woman realized justice was not hers.
   a. She appealed to a higher power (in this case, the court system).

b. She pleaded for justice to be done.

3. Because the judge was unjust, the woman had to rely on her own persistence.
   a. Certainly we have all experienced this in life.
   b. So many factors seem to play into decisions that justice, at times, eludes us.
4. Yet the purpose of this story is to present a contrast to Jesus, not a similarity.
   a. **We can trust our heavenly Father to be <u>just</u>.**
   b. We do not have to beg and plead with Him; we can make our petition known and leave it at His feet.

E. Who Owns the Right for Retribution?

1. The Bible shows us on several occasions that retribution does not belong to us (Romans 12:19; Genesis 18:25; Psalm 37:1–3; Psalm 1:6; Revelation 20:12).
2. Since Jesus is the only true judge, He has called us to relinquish retribution to Him. He is the only standard of justice, so to take matters into our own hands is to tell Him, "I don't trust You to make things right; I have to do it myself."
   a. As you recall from the previous lesson, in situations of abuse and other related incidents, we consult the proper authorities and follow the appropriate course of action.
   b. But beyond dealing with the legal consequences of an offense, we have to analyze our personal grudges and desire for retribution. Are we obsessed with making someone pay?
3. **We are called to <u>accept</u> (as a matter of faith) that Jesus, whose ways are above our ways and whose thoughts are above our thoughts, has a better plan than we do.**

F. The Symptom of Holding On to Retribution

1. If we do not release others, a symptom arises in our lives. **That symptom is <u>anger</u>.**
2. Yes, anger is a natural emotion, but we are talking about out-of-control anger that ends up dominating our actions. No matter how often we express this kind of anger, we find no lasting relief.
   a. We become frustrated with the success of the one who hurt us.
   b. We become furious at that person's ability to move on.
   c. We are flabbergasted over the person's lack of desire to reconcile.
3. If we do not find a way to break free from this cycle, we will find negative results from our uncontrolled anger.
   a. Anger rarely impacts only the person at whom it is directed.
   b. It rarely stays focused on the actual offense.
   c. It often results in unintended expressions (yelling, violence, and so on).
4. It is understandable, right? I mean, that person owes me. But forgiveness must take the high road.

Activity — Don't Carry Extra Weight

1. *Bring various weights to class (preferably dumbbells, but you can use any other heavy objects).*
2. *Tell students you want to find out who is the fastest student in the class. (Note: Since some Junior High students are uncomfortable with competing or have undisclosed medical concerns, it may be best to make this activity optional. Students not participating can still observe and will still get the point of the exercise):*
3. *Line up participating students in a single-file line and get a stopwatch ready.*
4. *Have each student run, one at a time, to a previously-determined finish line. Time each student and record the times.*
5. *After students race, inform them of their time.*
6. *Once the last student has finished, repeat the exercise. This time, though, have each student run while holding one of the weights. Compare their times.*
7. *The Point:* The Book of Hebrews instructs us to lay down our weights while running the Christian race (Hebrews 12:1). Unforgiveness is a weight that will keep us from being all we can be in Jesus.

G. The Paradox of Forgiveness

1. Herein is the paradox of forgiveness. By definition, the person we forgive owes us; yet, to forgive, we must choose to cancel that debt.
2. Yes, forgiving others means letting go of the pain, but it also means letting go of payback for the wrong that was done.
3. We see a beautiful example of this in our Lord and Savior on the cross:
   a. *Read Luke 23:34.*
   b. Jesus was bleeding, battered, bruised, and broken.
   c. He was naked for all the world to see.
   d. He was suffering physically, mentally, and emotionally.
   e. Soldiers mocked and taunted Him.
   f. Indeed, Jesus was the Judge and had every right to require retribution.
4. Yet even though He had a right to require it, Jesus chose a different path. **He said, "Father, <u>forgive</u> them"** (Luke 23:34).
5. In that moment Jesus had every right to pray for justice; instead, His flesh cried out for the Spirit to cancel the debt against His murderers. What an incredible Savior we serve!

H. Moving On

1. So how do we do it? How do we release others from the debt they owe us?
2. We know we cannot forgive and forget, but is it possible to forgive and move on?
3. If we have not completed the steps to forgiving others that were outlined in the last lesson, we will need to start there. We cannot release someone we have not truly forgiven.

4. But if we have worked through those emotions and truly forgiven the person, we can follow these steps to fully release the person.

I. Verbalize It to Jesus

1. In prayer we can say something similar to what Jesus said on the cross. We do not just forgive the person, but we ask Jesus to do the same.
2. Pray, "Jesus, I have forgiven this person; I am asking You to forgive this person. I am asking You not to hold this person accountable for the wrong done to me."

J. Pray for Jesus to Bless the Person

1. This is potentially the most difficult step in forgiving others.
2. It is one thing to say, "I am letting go of this." It is another thing to say, "I am not only letting go, but I want this person to be blessed."
3. Pray these blessings as specifically as possible.
4. Why is this step so important? **It is hard to stay angry at someone we are praying for Jesus to bless.**

K. Trust Jesus to Be Righteous

1. This all begins and ends with faith. We cannot please Jesus unless we have faith.
2. Faith means more than just believing in Jesus. It means believing that He wants the very best for us, and His plan is the best plan for us.

L. Set the Person Free (and Yourself as Well)

1. If you are waiting for someone to right all the wrongs done to you, stop. Surrender retribution to Jesus, and give others a clean slate.
2. Set your offender free, and you will feel free as well.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Pray with your students for God to help them fully release the person they need to forgive from the penalty and debt that person owes.*
2. *Encourage students to verbalize that forgiveness and to pray that Jesus will forgive the person too.*

B. Option 2 — Letting Go

1. *For this activity, you will need one helium-filled balloon for each student.*
2. *Take students outside and hand each one a helium balloon and a marker. Instruct students to write on their balloons the name of a person who hurt them (being careful not to pop the balloons).*
3. *Pray as a group, encouraging students to choose to release this person from the obligation to make things right with them.*
4. *Pray that Jesus will completely forgive this person and not hold the sin against this person. Then, as a symbol of releasing that person, students let go of the balloons.*

Teachers Note: Mass balloon releases may be illegal in several states, cities, and countries.

States that have laws: California, Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee and Virginia. Cities that have laws: Ocean City, Maryland; Louisville, Kentucky; Huntsville, Alabama; San Francisco, California; Nantucket, Massachusetts; Provincetown, Massachusetts; and Baltimore, Maryland.

Just make sure you are checking laws and specifics before choosing to do any activity. Source: balloonsblow.org/laws-concerning-balloons/

Lesson 4

Give Jesus Our Trust

Week of June 28, 2020

Biblical Passage

John 11:21, 32

Bible Point

While in a literal sense Jesus has never done anything wrong and therefore requires no forgiveness, we have all experienced times when He did not move how or when we wanted. In this lesson we will discuss letting go of any offenses we may hold toward God and trusting Him to be sovereign in our lives.

Supplies

Pens, white computer paper (1 sheet per student), markers; *optional:* handwoven rug

Legend:

PowerPoint Slide

Student Handbook

Activity

Unit Aim: One of the hardest things Christians must do is learn to forgive. It is completely contrary to our humanity, yet Jesus tells us if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. In this unit we will study how to let go of hurts and hang-ups as we discuss four "gives" of forgiveness.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Have you ever prayed about something but Jesus did not answer the way you hoped? How did you feel about it?
3. Have you ever been frustrated with God? Why or why not?
4. The Bible says His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9). What does this mean to you?
5. How do we learn to trust God, even when He does not do what we want?

B. Option 2 — The Back Side of the Tapestry

1. *Bring in a handwoven rug to show students. Either hang it up or hold it up for them to see, showing them only the back side.*
2. *Ask students to try to guess what the rug depicts.*
3. *Then turn the rug around to show them the front side. Ask the following questions:*
   a. How is this demonstration similar to our relationship with God?
   b. The Bible tells us God works all things together for our good. Do we always see the good in each situation?
   c. What does it mean to trust Him?

Explore

A. Review

1. Many things about living for Jesus are simply not natural. Forgiveness is one of those things, but it is also necessary in our Christian walk.
2. The dictionary defines the word *forgive* in very simple terms. It means "to cancel a debt."
3. The first (and often hardest) person to forgive is yourself. We feel the weight of our mistakes, and we believe we should be punished, so we punish ourselves. Yet Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins, so we should embrace His forgiveness.

4. It can be difficult to forgive others. Remember, forgiveness is something we offer, and it often goes to those who deserve it the least. If we do not forgive others, though, Scripture plainly tells us we will not find forgiveness for ourselves either.
5. Last lesson we talked about not just forgiving others but releasing them as well. We cannot "forgive and forget," but we can (and must) "forgive and release." To do this, we must:
   a. verbalize it to Jesus,
   b. pray for Jesus to bless that person,
   c. trust Jesus to be righteous.

B. Who Else Should We Forgive?

1. This may be the oddest topic in this entire series. We have talked about forgiving ourselves and forgiving others. Who else do we have left to forgive?
2. Well, there is one with whom we sometimes find ourselves in contention . . . and we are not alone. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, did too, as did her sister, Mary.
3. *Read John 11:21, 32.*

C. Forgive Jesus?

1. "Now wait a minute," you may say. "Jesus never did anything wrong." This is true. The Bible is very clear about this.
2. *Have multiple students look up and read these verses: Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 5:8; Matthew 7:11; James 1:17; I John 1:5.*
3. What a beautiful commentary Scripture gives us on the overwhelming love of our heavenly Father. In fact, **you could easily consider the Bible as a personal love letter from Jesus to you**. You can know from the pages of this sacred Book that:
   a. Jesus loves you unconditionally.
   b. He pours out that love unreservedly.
   c. He fights for you unashamedly.
   d. He always wants the best for you.
4. With all of this in view, how could we ever find ourselves bitter or frustrated with Jesus?

D. So What Is the Problem?

1. There is a problem, though. You see, we want the best for ourselves too; however, our thinking, unlike Jesus' thinking, is carnally influenced. Because of Jesus' nature, His thoughts and actions are pure and untainted, but that is not the case for us.
2. For us, the opposite is true. We are carnal beings. **Our carnal nature is constantly at war, and we must constantly put that nature under subjection to the Holy Spirit**. This is a war we absolutely must win, because the consequences are dire.
3. *Read Romans 8:6.*

4. By nature we are prone to be impacted by our five senses: what we can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Yet the closer we draw to the world, the further we drift from God.
5. *Read James 4:4.*
6. Do we see the problem clearly now?
   a. Jesus wants what is best for me, and I want what is best for me.
   b. His thinking is pure, holy, and right.
   c. My thinking is influenced by my own carnality.
   d. His thinking and my thinking are in conflict, so we will not always agree on what is best for me.

E. The Crossroads

1. We find ourselves constantly at a crossroads between our will and His will. At this crossroads, we must make a choice. Though we would like to pretend we always make the right choices, the reality is we often don't. When we don't, there are consequences.
2. Consider this example.
   a. A small child does not know what is best for him. Mom may tell him, "I know you are hungry, but you don't need a cookie right now; let's wait until after dinner."
   b. When Mom leaves the kitchen, though, the child dives headlong into the cookie jar, filling his belly with cookies. The child may have thought this was a great idea, but he soon discovers it isn't.
   c. As the family sits down to the dinner table, the child is already full, nauseated, and battling a sugar crash. Mom can tell something is wrong, and after a quick investigation, she discovers what has happened. The child is punished and sent to bed.
   d. This child can blame Mom for:
      (1) not having dinner ready sooner,
      (2) leaving the cookies where he could access them,
      (3) not preparing healthier snacks to begin with.
   e. However, Mom knows that, at some point, if she does not teach the child self-control in the little things, he will never grasp self-control over bigger things.

Activity — Don't Blame the Wrong Person

1. *Hand each student a sheet of white paper and a marker. Instruct students to write, in large letters, the best excuse they have ever heard for someone not turning in his or her homework.*
2. *Let students take turns sharing their answers and the stories behind them.*
3. People like to blame not getting homework done on someone or something else, but at the end of the day, the only person responsible for getting your homework done is you.
4. *The Point:* It is easy for us to make excuses for why Jesus was unfair to us, but He is always righteous. It is not His responsibility to change; it is ours.

F. Why?

1. *Why* is the first question word most of us learn, but it is also the one Jesus is most prone to leave unanswered. **We do not always understand <u>why</u>, and Jesus often does not explain Himself**.
2. Just because we do not understand the why does not mean there is not a good reason.
3. *Read Isaiah 55:9.*

G. The Most Difficult Aspect of Living for Jesus

1. As human beings (and especially as North Americans) we are wired to be independent thinkers, set our own course, and master our own destiny. Jesus, though, calls us to lay down those rights, so we can embrace something far better.
2. This is not an easy thing to do. Have you ever prayed a prayer and it seemed so obvious what the right answer should be, yet Jesus did not answer the way you expected? Maybe you
   a. prayed for a loved one, but she died anyway,
   b. prayed for healing, but the disease persists,
   c. prayed for a financial breakthrough, but the bills keep coming,
   d. prayed for direction from the Spirit, but the answers still allude you,
   e. and the list goes on.
3. **Sometimes <u>Jesus</u> does not show up the way we expect, and our feelings gets hurt over it**.
   a. We begin to believe the lies of the enemy that, for whatever reason, Jesus is no longer interested in being there for us.
   b. In the same way we can be hurt by people who disappoint us, if we do not have a right perspective, we can be disappointed in God and feel hurt.
   c. We have defined forgiveness as canceling a debt, and we have looked at offenses as being those debts we feel we are owed by people who have hurt us. In that sense, it is possible for us to feel God owes us a debt when He does not do something we expect. As strange as it sounds, we must forgive Jesus of any self-perceived debt.

H. The Symptom

1. How do we know we are struggling to trust Jesus? Well, just as we saw in the other aspects of forgiveness, we see a very clear symptom of this lack of forgiveness in our lives. **The symptom is <u>faithlessness</u>,** which is connected to our hesitation to trust Jesus.
2. Faithlessness can manifest itself in us in many ways:
   a. Lack of prayer and Bible reading
   b. Not taking spiritual counsel of the Holy Ghost and spiritual leaders when making key life-altering decisions
   c. Withholding our finances from the Kingdom

d. Rejecting clear biblical instruction ("I know what the Bible says, but . . .")
e. Trying to "blend in" instead of allowing our witness to show through
f. Withdrawing into ourselves

3. Sometimes we may even blame Jesus for negative circumstances in our lives.
   a. Adam blamed God for Eve and him partaking of the fruit.
   b. Abraham and Sarah blamed God for Ishmael.
   c. Gideon blamed God for the Midianite invasion.
   d. Elijah blamed God for Jezebel's death threats.
4. Suffice it say, we are not the first people to get upset at God, and we will not be the last.

I. Returning to Faith and Trust

1. So where do we go from here? If we have lost faith in Jesus because of pain we have experienced, how can we let go of that pain and be reconciled to Him?
2. Three specific steps can help us on this journey.
   a. Express Our Frustration to Jesus
      (1) We can explain to Jesus, in detail, what happened, what we wanted Him to do differently, and why it hurts.
      (2) Notice, this is exactly what Mary and Martha did ("Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died").
      (3) We may think this is inappropriate (and we must be mindful not to be irreverent), but Jesus already knows how we feel.
   b. Release Jesus of All Perceived Debt
      (1) We should tell Jesus, "I am surrendering this pain to You."
      (2) This may feel silly, because we know, and He knows, He did nothing wrong. However, this is about releasing those feelings to Him.
      (3) Repeat this as many times as necessary until there is an emotional release from the situation.
   c. Reaffirm Our Faith
      (1) We read Martha's words to Jesus earlier, but let's look at her follow-up statement. (*Read John 11:22.*)
      (2) Paul said something similar after expressing the pain and turmoil of his situation. (*Read II Timothy 1:12.*)
      (3) **We must express our faith in Jesus <u>verbally</u> and then take steps to demonstrate that faith <u>physically</u>.** We cannot just tell Him we trust Him; we must show Him we trust Him by taking steps to grow in our relationship with Him.

J. Trust in Jesus

1. If you are holding on to frustration with Jesus, stop.
2. **Trust Jesus to be sovereign and allow Him to work all things for your <u>good</u>.**
3. He is weaving a beautiful tapestry together, and even if every step of the process does not make sense to you, at the end you will be glad you let Him have control.
4. Give Jesus your trust. He did not die for you so you could live a miserable life. He loves you, and He wants the very best for you.

EXPAND

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Pray with your students to let go of times in their lives when Jesus did not move the way they expected.*
2. *Pray that Jesus will help them place their trust fully in Him.*
3. *Pray that they will place their confidence in Jesus alone, trusting that He desires the best for them.*

B. Option 2 — Reflections

1. *Ask students to share something from any of the four lessons of this series that particularly resonated with them.*
2. *Ask volunteers to share what steps they have taken to fully embrace forgiveness in their lives.*

Lesson 5

Into the Darkness

Week of July 5, 2020

Biblical Passage

Jonah 1:1–3

Bible Point

God is not afraid of the dark places in our world, in our homes, or in our hearts; He is willing to go there with us.

Supplies

Pens, blindfold; *optional:* paper (1 sheet per small group)

Legend:

PowerPoint Slide

Student Handbook

Activity

Unit Aim: The Book of Jonah reveals how God relates to a broken world. In this unit we will go into the depths with Jonah and discover a God of incredible love and forgiveness who is present in the darkest places of our world and our hearts.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Were you afraid of the dark as a child?
3. If so, why do you think that was?
4. Are there some areas of your life that you are afraid to explore? Why or why not?
5. What are some things you have done to try to overcome fear in your life?

B. Option 2 — Little Red Riding Hood

1. Ask students to share a favorite childhood story (e.g., Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, and so on).
2. *Share the basic outline of the Little Red Riding Hood childhood story.*
   a. A little girl with a little red hood takes her grandmother a basket of goodies. She is warned to watch out for a bad wolf. When the little girl arrives at her grandmother's house, the wolf has already been there, has eaten her grandmother, and is lying in bed with her grandmother's clothes on. This is where the famous "oh what big eyes, big ears, big teeth" exchange takes place.
   b. There are many different versions of the story available now. In some versions Red Riding Hood gets eaten also, and in some just her grandmother does. In some versions a huntsman comes along and cuts both the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood out of the wolf, and in some the huntsman saves Little Red Riding Hood and just cuts out the grandmother.
3. This story and many other moral tales like Little Red Riding Hood have a theme similar to the Book of Jonah.
4. In many retellings the character of Little Red Riding Hood is swallowed by the wolf. When she finally comes out of the wolf's belly, she has experienced an internal change or deeper understanding of the way the world works, and she never leaves the path again.
5. Pinocchio, Hansel and Gretel, Beowulf, and many other characters

experience this same theme of transformation after a period of engulfment.

6. We will see this fairy-tale-like theme appear in the story of Jonah as we walk through it over the next four weeks.

EXPLORE

A. Putting Distance between Me and God's Grace

1. *Read Jonah 1:1–3.*
2. Notice the phrase "unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."
3. Why do you think this phrase is repeated twice?
   a. Typically when you see words or phrases repeated in Scripture, it is an indication from the author to pay attention.
   b. **Tarshish was the most distant and remote location from Nineveh that Jonah could reach.** The author linked Tarshish with getting as far away from the presence of the Lord as possible, indicating Jonah was trying to escape.

B. Where Is God's Grace Most Present?

1. The people of Nineveh were idolatrous and cruel. As enemies of Israel, they were a hated people.
2. If there were a place where God's grace was least expected and most needed, it was Nineveh.
3. Yet we know the story includes God's grace to Nineveh and its people.

C. The Character of Jonah; the Character of God

1. Jonah did not want to go where God was telling him to go. What does this tell us about Jonah's character?
2. Jonah was very deliberate in avoiding the place God was sending him because he knew the character of God. **Jonah knew God would forgive the vilest of people.**
   a. Do you know of a place like Nineveh in the world today?
   b. Do you see qualities of the people of Nineveh in yourself?
3. What does this Bible incident tell us about God?
   a. It tells us **God is very comfortable and active in those places where we resist going.**
   b. Those places where we think God is least likely to be, where we think God's grace is least likely to delve, those places that harbor the vilest of human sin—God is OK there, and He wants to be with us when we go there.
   c. God is not surprised, offended, or afraid of any of these places.
4. Experiencing the peace and presence of God and seeing His grace at work in our lives is directly connected to our willingness to turn toward and face the darkness in our world.

D. Why Go?

1. Why was going to Nineveh so important?
   a. God was moving Jonah, and God is moving us to the realization

that the peace, presence, and joy of God are not circumstantial.

   b. **The peace, presence, and joy of God are not tethered to a location or an event.**

2. Why is going to places like Nineveh so important for us?
3. Only when we let go of the surface or circumstantial joy and travel into the dark places can we discover a light, a joy, and a peace that are powerful enough to sustain us beyond our circumstances.
4. What do the first three verses of Jonah chapter 1 teach us?
   a. **God is telling us, through Jonah, that there really is no place where He is not present and working.**
   b. God is telling us that the joy we feel in Tarshish is not absent in Nineveh; it is very much alive. Ocean deep, abiding joy is not found in a place but in His presence, and He is everywhere.

Activity — Follow the Voice

1. *Select a volunteer; place a blindfold on the volunteer.*
2. *While the student is blindfolded, set up various obstacles in the room.*
3. *Select another student to serve as a guide for the blindfolded student. While the blindfolded student attempts to walk across the room, the guide should give only verbal directions. (The guide should not touch the blindfolded student.)*
4. *Time permitting, repeat the exercise with multiple students.*

E. Follow the Leader Q&A

1. Which would you prefer: to be led on a journey with your eyes open or closed?
   a. **It is easier to follow the leader when we can see where we are being led.**
   b. We also feel more in control, which provides a deeper sense of security.
2. When following the leader, who is in control when our eyes are open and when our eyes are closed?
3. Regardless of eyes being open or closed, the path we walk is really out of our control when another is leading us.
4. If having our eyes open does not control how good the path is, what is the determining factor on whether the path we are being led on is good or bad?
5. Does the story of Jonah teach us it is important that we are good or that the one who leads us is good?
6. How would it impact your choices and the direction of your life if you placed your trust first in the goodness of God?
   a. Would you attempt greater things knowing you are held in the goodness of God?
   b. Would you fear less when faced with difficult situations if you knew God was there with you and could work that moment out for good?

c. Would you be more inclined to be selfish or selfless if you knew God's position toward you would always be goodness?
d. Would you feel more secure in dark places if you knew God was there as well?

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. Jesus, please help us identify what we might be running toward to avoid You, whether something good or bad.
2. Help us see what we might be afraid of facing in our lives that is keeping Your goodness from overflowing in and through us.
3. Give us the courage to trust in You and Your presence in the face of our own Nineveh.

B. Option 2 — Jonah's Job

1. *Form groups of three or four students.*
2. *Ask groups*: How would Jonah's story have played out if he had obeyed God from the beginning?
3. *While considering this question, have each group rewrite the first chapter of Jonah. Once they are done, give each group a chance to present their thoughts.*

Lesson 6

Into the Why

Week of July 12, 2020

Biblical Passage

Jonah 1:4–17; 2; Mark 4:35–41

Bible Point

We may wonder why we go through various storms of life; however, often the storm is our deliverance.

Supplies

Pens, index cards (1 per student)

Legend:

PowerPoint Slide

Student Handbook

Activity

Unit Aim: The Book of Jonah reveals how God relates to a broken world. In this unit we will go into the depths with Jonah and discover a God of incredible love and forgiveness who is present in the darkest places of our world and our hearts.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Who is one of your heroes?
3. Why is that person your hero?
4. Have you ever experienced a storm in life when you felt you needed a hero to rescue you? What was that like?
5. Have you ever found yourself asking God, "Why?" How did God respond?

B. Option 2 — A Redundant Question

1. *Have students find a partner. In each pair, one student will be the interviewer; the other student will be the interviewee.*
2. *The interviewees begin to tell what they did yesterday. After each statement, the interviewers ask, "Why?"*
3. *Then students switch roles and repeat the exercise.*
4. *Ask the following questions*:
   a. What was that exercise like?
   b. Were you asked "why?" about something for which you did not have an immediate answer?
   c. Is it easy to examine our motives?
5. In today's lesson, we will explore that challenging question: why?

Explore

A. Heroes

1. *Read Jonah 1:4–17; 2.*
2. Who is supposed to be the hero in Jonah chapter 1? Why is he or isn't he?
3. Superheroes play a big role in our culture's storytelling.
   a. What is the number one responsibility of a superhero?
   b. The number one role of modern-day superheroes is protecting human life.

B. Life

1. The narrator of Jonah used Jonah's actions and reactions, and the actions and reactions of the sailors, to highlight something of apparent value.
   a. What do you think that is? (*Expected answer: life*)
   b. It is the same thing we all hold most valuable.
2. **Without <u>life</u> we have no opportunity to experience anything**.
   Without life we cannot even have this conversation or any conversation.
3. The narrator of Jonah repeatedly highlighted the importance of life throughout the first chapter of Jonah.
   a. Jonah refused to go and deliver God's message, thus removing the chance for life for others.
   b. **Jonah risked the lives of the sailors by including them in his <u>disobedience</u>**.
   c. The sailors did everything they could to weather the storm and save lives.
   d. The sailors prayed to every god they knew, they threw valuable items overboard, they worked tirelessly to preserve life in the storm, and Jonah slept.
   e. Jonah essentially asked for his life to be taken, and the sailors initially refused, not wanting to see the loss of life.
   f. Finally Jonah was thrown overboard, and all lives were spared.
4. The main message is that life is important to God, and what we do with our lives is important because no life is independent of God and others.

C. Storms and Fish

1. What happened in the storm and what happened inside the fish? *Revelation*
2. **When Jonah was swallowed by the fish, all his <u>options</u> were gone**.
   a. There was no more running this way or going that way. The sailors were caught in the midst of the storm, and no matter how much they had prayed, unloaded, or rowed, the storm was not going away. There was nowhere else to go.
   b. The storm and the fish revealed all that was left.
3. **Storms reveal our <u>character</u>**.
   a. *Read Mark 4:35–41*.
   b. When the storm comes, Jesus is at peace, and He brings peace.
   c. In the Book of Jonah, we do not find a restless, nervous, fretting God. We find a God who is present in the storm, and when that presence is acknowledged, there is a peace that surpasses the storm.
   d. Storms reveal whether we have peace or whether we are just chasing peace.

4. **Storms reveal God's <u>presence</u>.**
   a. God was present in Nineveh.
   b. The further Jonah ran, the deeper into God's presence he found himself.
      (1) God was present in the storm.
      (2) God was present in the peace after the storm.
      (3) God was present in sending both Jonah and the fish.
      (4) God was present with the poor sailors, who did not even know Him.
      (5) God was present with the prophet, who would not obey Him.
      (6) God was present in the belly of the fish.
      (7) God is present when nothing is wrong.
      (8) God is present when nothing is right.
5. Storms and deep, dark places show us that God is still present when nothing else is.

D. Help and Thanks

1. Hand out index cards and pens. Ask students to write on their index cards: Help and Thanks. On the other side, have them write: Why?
2. What kind of prayer was Jonah praying?
3. Jonah's fish prayer was made up of quotes from the Book of Psalms.
   a. There are two basic types of psalms: help or lament and thanksgiving.
   b. Which type do you think Jonah was primarily pulling from for his prayer?
   c. Psalm 3; 18; 30; 42; 69; 139; and 142 are thanksgiving psalms.
4. Sometimes when we are praying for rescue from the storms and fish, it is really the storms and fish that are rescuing us.
5. Jonah's response in the belly of the whale was not what we expect. **It was a response of <u>thanksgiving</u>.**
6. Jonah concluded his prayer, and we find in the belly of the fish a man who saw clearly who he was and who his God was—a God of salvation. Jonah understood that God was still with him.

Activity — Get in Position

1. *Have students gather together in a large circle.*
2. *Play the playground game Ninja. If you are unfamiliar with the game, you can find the instructions at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninja_(playground_game).*

E. What Kind of Person Do You Want to Be When the Storm Hits?

1. Two positions are illuminated in Jonah 1 and 2: our position and God's position.
   a. Our position can be anything from faithless to faithful. We can be rich or poor, knowledgeable or ignorant, obedient or disobedient, prayerful or prayerless.
   b. God's position is always faithful toward salvation.
2. Jonah chapters 1 and 2 end with God as Savior.
3. The children of Israel defined their history by the salvation of God, not by their sin, their failures, their shortcomings, or their losses and defeats.
4. If you had asked them who they were even in the midst of exile and captivity, they would have responded that they were the children of the God who saves.

F. Holding Failure and Finding Favor

1. Can you recall at least one time you felt like you really failed?
2. **What we learn from Jonah is that no matter what circumstance, failure, problem, sin, trial, or issue we lift up to God, the moment we lift it up to Him, it is gone and it is no longer necessary for us to carry the weight of it.**

G. How Do You See Your Situation?

1. Are you grasping onto life so hard that you are not actually living it?
2. Do you think God is absent in your situation, when in reality He is right in the midst of it?
3. Are you asking for help to deal with your situation, or are you giving thanks that God cared enough to trust you with this hardship?
4. It is all about perspective.
5. Take a moment to reflect on how you often see yourself and your situation.
   a. Do you first think of your flaws: physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise?
   b. Do you think of mistakes you have made?
   c. Do you see yourself primarily through your eyes or through His eyes?
   d. Do you see yourself first as a sinner who needs to be forgiven by your Savior?
   e. Do you see Jesus as your Savior ready to forgive your sins?

EXPAND

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Ask if any students are facing a storm in their life.*
2. *Pray for each request individually.*

a. *Ask God to reveal Himself in the midst of the storm.*
b. *Ask God to use the storm to transform those individuals into the kind of people He would have them be.*
c. *Ask God to give them a new way of seeing themselves as children of the God who saves.*

B. Option 2 — Pair and Share

1. *Help or Thanks—It Is Your Choice*
   a. *Using the index cards created earlier, have students turn their cards over to the "Help and Thanks" side. Have them circle their choice to the following question. What kind of person do you want to be when the storm hits: a person who prays for help or a person who is able to give thanks?*
   b. *Have students find a partner and share why they made their choice.*
2. *Identity*
   a. *Have partners share with one another how they tend to define themselves: by their sins, failures, shortcomings, or losses, or as a child of the God who saves.*
   b. *Have partners share with each other which one they want to be defined by and why.*

Lesson 7
Into the Depths of Forgiveness
Week of July 19, 2020

Unit Aim: The Book of Jonah reveals how God relates to a broken world. In this unit we will go into the depths with Jonah and discover a God of incredible love and forgiveness who is present in the darkest places of our world and our hearts.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Have you ever done something that was expected of you, but in a way that was only "technically" obeying?
3. Why did you have a hard time putting your heart into the task?
4. Do you think obeying is the same as submitting? Why or why not?
5. Do you think Jesus prefers obedience or submission? Why?

B. Option 2 — Tower Contest

1. *Form two groups.*
2. *Give each group Styrofoam cups or building blocks.*
3. *Instruct both groups to build a tower as tall as possible. Tell one group to build the tower as quickly as they can. Tell the other group to build the tower as sturdy as they can.*
4. *After the exercise, ask the following questions*:
   a. Which group built a tower that is more likely to last?
   b. Why do we sometimes do things quickly instead of taking the time to do them correctly?
5. Even when we do not give our best effort, God can still move in our lives. In today's lesson, we will take a look at God's forgiveness.

Explore

A. Who Did It Better?

1. *Read Jonah 3:1–10.*
2. *Read Nahum 1:1–6; 3:1–19.*
3. Consider Jonah's and Nahum's prophecies.
   a. Who did a more thorough job?
   b. Who really seemed to pour himself into the task before him?
4. **The purpose of prophecy is to bring about <u>change</u>.** Which prophecy would be most likely to get you to change?

Biblical Passage
Jonah 3; Nahum 1:1–6; 3:1–19

Bible Point
Humanity has always had a great capacity for destruction, but we have yet to exhaust the depths of God's forgiveness.

Supplies
Pens; *optional:* Styrofoam cups or building blocks; *optional:* balloons (1 per student) and pin

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

5. Directly disobeying God did not go so well. So do you think Jonah possibly took a different route—the indirect route?
   a. He delivered the message as quickly and simply as he could.
   b. Was Jonah's intent to see these people repent and receive forgiveness, or was he most interested in just doing his part?

B. Disproportionate Results

1. Notice the sweeping difference between Jonah's simple prophecy and Nineveh's over-the-top reaction.
2. There are two things we can take away from Jonah and Nineveh.
3. Walking with God is like a pulley system. **Extraordinary things can be accomplished when we place our lives and efforts in Jesus' hands.**
   a. We can give and receive incredible amounts of forgiveness.
   b. We can overcome fears, doubts, failures, sin, abuses, pain, or loss.
   c. God can do a lot with the little we have.
4. **Results belong to Jesus.** This is one of the ways He makes it easier on us. We are not the heavy lifters in the equation.
   a. What others do with the grace we offer is not up to us.
   b. Salvation is of the Lord.
   c. Healing is of the Lord.
   d. Deliverance is of the Lord.
   e. Reconciliation is of the Lord.
   f. Revival is of the Lord.
5. God does not ask us to produce results; anything we do to get what we want is putting the weight of production on our lives.

C. Grace, Faith, and a Little More on Results

1. God carries the weightiest part of our lives.
2. God is not looking for superhuman efforts; in fact, if we ever do anything in this life, it is because of His efforts on our behalf.
   a. Moses stretched his rod.
   b. David flung a stone.
   c. Naaman dipped seven times for healing.
   d. The efforts of those healed by Jesus in the New Testament were miniscule—hand stretching, eye washing, taking up their beds and walking.
3. **Salvation, deliverance, and healing are not produced by our efforts but by Jesus' grace.**
4. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matthew 7:16, NKJV).
   a. "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (John 15:4, NKJV).
   b. Abide in Him and He will produce the fruit effortlessly.
   c. Seek the kingdom and all these things will be added (Matthew 6:33).
   d. Come to Him; He will produce the rest (Matthew 11:28).

e. Trust and watch as He produces salvation, deliverance, hope, comfort, love, forgiveness, healing, and revival.
f. Grace is not God's response to faith. You do not need more faith; you need more grace. Faith is the product of grace.

5. The results in the Book of Jonah reflect God's grace.
   a. The word *repent* in Jonah 3 might be better understood as "relent."
   b. God had compassion and did not bring destruction upon the Ninevites.

D. Disproportionate Results (Again)

1. Remember: extraordinary things can be accomplished when we place our lives and efforts in Jesus' hands.
   a. **We can impact many lives by simply <u>modeling</u> a Christian lifestyle.**
   b. We can overcome fears, doubts, failures, sin, abuses, pain, or loss.
   c. Minimal talent or experience can be multiplied when we trust God for the rest.
2. We are not the heavy lifters in the equation.
   a. Once we sow seed and invest in a friend's spirituality, the rest is up to God.
   b. God works on the hearts of people we witness to.
   c. God is the one who answers our prayers.
   d. God makes a way for people, even when we cannot see the possibility.

Activity — Simon Says

1. *Gather the class together in a circle.*
2. *Play the game Simon Says. If you are unfamiliar with the game, you can find the instructions at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon_Says.*

E. A Reflection of God

1. *Read Jonah 3:9–10.*
2. God is doing something specific in these verses that is akin to what we call mirroring. Have you ever seen a parent and an infant making faces at each other, or have you done this with an infant? Did you know this is more than a simple activity for both parties involved?
   a. This is important and essential for deepening trust in human relationships.
   b. For a parent and an infant, this activity helps to form a bond.
3. We do this activity more often than we realize.
   a. Have you ever had a friend who went through a breakup, who lost a grandparent, or who received an amazing birthday gift?
   b. In that moment when your friend first relayed the news to you and you were face to face with this person, what happened to your face?
   c. If it was a sad occasion, did your face mirror the occasion? If it was celebratory, did your face reflect that?

4. When we mirror to others what we are feeling, it establishes a connection and shows that we care.
5. **How we <u>respond</u> to others is important.**
    a. If they are angry, sad, or joyful, we find a way to get to where they are and mirror back.
    b. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15, NKJV).
    c. When I mirror, I am letting you know you are not alone. I will be with you where you are.
6. When we read that God repented, we are witnessing a sort of divine mirroring.
    a. God was responding to the repentance, emotion, and movements of His children, letting them know they were not alone and He would be with them right where they were. In this remarkable moment, we are given a particular picture of God.
    b. We are shown a God whose nature is extravagant.
    c. We are shown a God capable of incredible humility and grace.
    d. We are shown a God who is not afraid to be with us wherever we are.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Lead the group in a prayer thanking God for extravagant grace that leads to a beautiful life full of love and goodness.*
2. *Ask God to enter into students' lives and mirror to them His concern and compassion.*
3. *Ask God to help each of us learn to demonstrate His love to others when we find them in a place of need.*

B. Option 2 — Balloons and Forgiveness

1. *Give each student a balloon.*
2. *Lead students in thinking through their lives.*
    a. Think of a loss you suffered and blow into the balloon, inflating it a little.
    b. Think of a doubt; add more air.
    c. Think of a fear; add more air.
    d. Think of pain suffered; add more air.
    e. Think of an abuse; add more air.
    f. Think of anger; add more air.
    g. Think of violence; add more air.
3. *Talk through a couple of issues in the world at large that are representative of sin and destruction (war, abortion, and so on); add more air each time. Then have students tie a knot in the end of their balloons.*

4. The people of Nineveh were incredibly violent and vile people, yet with a simple fast and repentance, God responded with sweeping forgiveness.
5. *Have a few students at a time to come to the front with their inflated balloons. Have them close their eyes and form a V with their hands. Then place the inflated balloon in the V and have them lift the balloon up as if offering all their failures to God.*
6. *Once their eyes are closed and hands are lifted, use a pin to burst their balloon.*
7. The suddenness of the balloon bursting serves as an example of the startling, extravagant, overwhelming nature of God's grace and forgiveness.

Lesson 8
Into His Grace
Week of July 26, 2020

Biblical Passage
Jonah 4

Bible Point
Living in relationship with God is about being the kind of person who reflects His extravagant love to every aspect of His creation.

Supplies
Paper, pens, markers; *optional:* device to play a streaming video; *optional:* paper (1 sheet per small group)

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

Unit Aim: The Book of Jonah reveals how God relates to a broken world. In this unit we will go into the depths with Jonah and discover a God of incredible love and forgiveness who is present in the darkest places of our world and our hearts.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Have you ever had someone pull a prank on you? What happened?
3. Have you ever seen someone get angry from a prank? What happened?
4. Is it okay to get angry over a prank? Why or why not?
5. Have you ever been angry because you felt someone did not get a punishment that was deserved? What happened?

B. Option 2 — Wooden Spoon Prank

1. *Show a video of the "Wooden Spoon Game" found on YouTube. It is a video of two guys playing a prank on a friend.*
   a. *One guy holds a wooden spoon in his mouth, and while his friend's head is down, he hits the friend on the head with the spoon.*
   b. *Instead of the guy with the spoon in his mouth using neck and head strength, he has a second guy whack the one with his head down with a different wooden spoon in his hand.*
   c. *The guy who has been hit on the head tries to hit the prankster on the head with the spoon in his mouth, but he cannot figure out why he is not able to hit as hard. Caution: this is very funny.*
2. *Ask students: Does the person being pranked have a right to be angry?*
3. Today we will talk about a time when Jonah got angry because he felt God had "pulled a prank" in a sense.

Explore

A. Conditions of God

1. *Read Jonah 4:1–11.*
2. When God sent Jonah to Nineveh, He sent him with a message. That message contained conditions for Nineveh.
   a. Forty days is forever. When you are waiting to get home, forty days is a long time. When you are waiting to eat, forty days is a really long time. When you are waiting for God to bring justice on a city like Nineveh, forty days is forever.

b. God's conditional time frame left a huge window for repentance, considering the vast amount of suffering caused by this empire.

3. Our human nature has a hard time understanding God giving such lenient conditions.
   a. For example, II Chronicles 33 tells the story of Manasseh, a king so evil he sacrificed his own children (verse 6).
   b. When he was captured, Manasseh decided to change and he called out to God. God was moved by Manasseh's prayers and delivered him, even restoring him to rule, despite all the cruel things he had done in his lifetime (verse 13).

B. Character of God

1. **God's <u>justice</u> does not work like our justice**.
   a. Have you ever felt like, "No! This person, these people, cannot get away with that—not without having to pay dearly for what they did"?
   b. God's forgiveness in Jonah's story shows us a difficult truth: grace and forgiveness are not about fairness.
2. **Forgiveness is not <u>painless</u>**.
   a. Forgiveness is not a feeling; it is an action. I am not for*feeling* you; I am for*giving* you.
   b. Once forgiveness has happened, you will be free in a way you have never known before forgiveness.
3. Since God's nature encompasses infinite love, instead of looking for ways not to forgive us, He is reaching for us and looking for ways to extend forgiveness.
4. Results belong to God. This is one of the ways He makes it easier on us. Again, we are not the heavy lifters in the equation.
   a. **What others do with the <u>grace</u> we offer is not up to us**.
   b. God does not ask us to produce results; anything we do to get what we want is putting the weight of production on our lives.

C. Calling of God

1. What would it mean to answer the call to repentance and receive this kind of love?
2. What would it mean to join with this kind of God in giving this kind of love?
3. What kind of world, nation, state, city, community, church, family, marriage, and life would we have if we joined with this kind of extravagant love?

Activity — What Makes You Happy?

1. *Give each student a sheet of paper and a pen or marker.*
2. *Have students write the answer to the following question in large letters on the paper:* What is something that makes you happy?
3. *After students have written something down, ask for volunteers to show the class their papers and explain their answers.*

D. Happy Time

1. Everyone wants to be happy, right? So what makes you happy?
2. Why was Jonah finally happy and grateful?
3. What do you think was the central component to Jonah's happiness and gratitude?
   a. **Jonah's happiness was inappropriately centered on his own <u>comfort</u>.**
   b. Jonah's efforts to create a place of comfort only left him miserable, but God brought him the comfort he needed without even being asked.
4. What does this tell us about Jonah and ourselves?
   a. Jonah was not happy that forgiveness was given; he was not happy that God's power and love were put on display; he was not happy that he got to play a part in this display; he was finally happy only when he was comfortable.
   b. When our lives are self-serving, self-seeking, and self-centered, our efforts will only leave us miserable, no matter how well-intentioned.
   c. Sometimes we are more worried about our standard of living in this world than we are about living by the extravagant, forgiving, loving standards of God's world.
5. What does this tell us about God?
   a. **God is always <u>others</u>-oriented.**
   b. God is always working to move us to a deeper place of joy and peace.
   c. God is able and willing to provide for us when we are incapable on our own.

E. Share Time

1. Share the story of a favorite gift you received, especially one you were very attached to (e.g., a childhood blanket, something sentimental, and so on).
   a. *Ask for others to share similar stories.*
   b. Share something that is important to you that might seem small to others (e.g., how toilet paper is supposed to be placed on the holder).
2. What did Jonah care about?
3. What does God care about?
4. God provided a gift for Jonah—a gourd from the Lord.
   a. Jonah found great comfort and delight in this gift. He became very attached to this gift that flourished. Jonah took great joy in the flourishing of the gift that comforted him. Jonah sunk into despair when the plant was gone.
   b. God said to Jonah, you took great joy in the flourishing of a plant, and you were very sorrowful when it died. Now you know how I feel about Nineveh.

5. **Jonah cared about a plant, but God cares about <u>people</u>.**
    a. Jonah was focused on his own comfort, his deliverance, his pain, his sense of justice, his rights, his loss, and his expectations.
    b. Were the things Jonah focused on legitimate needs? *Yes*
    c. Did Jonah ever find, manufacture, or sustain any joy or peace by being focused on his legitimate needs? *No*
    d. Were the people He gave life to using their lives in creative, loving, productive, and joyful ways? *No*
    e. Were the people He gave life to acknowledging this gift with gratitude? *No*
    f. Was the prophet God cared for, delivered, placed a special calling on, nurtured, and blessed with His name showing appropriate respect and gratitude for his blessings? *No*
6. What is your concern?
    a. Take a moment to reflect on what your primary concerns are.
    b. Do your concerns start with the needs of others or of self?
    c. What are some steps you can take or attitudes you can develop to be more others-oriented?

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Lead the group in a prayer thanking God for extravagant grace that leads to a beautiful life full of love and goodness.*
2. *Ask God to enter into students' lives and mirror to them His concern and compassion.*
3. *Ask God to help each of us learn to demonstrate His love to others when we find them in a place of need.*

B. Option 2 — How Should Jonah Have Responded?

1. *Form small groups of three or four students. Give each group a sheet of paper and a pen.*
2. *Ask them to consider the ending of the Book of Jonah. We know how Jonah reacted to God's forgiveness of the Ninevites, but how should he have responded?*
3. *Instruct each group to rewrite the ending of the Book of Jonah, with Jonah doing the right thing. After everyone is done, give each group a chance to present their thoughts.*

Enliven Your Students' Study

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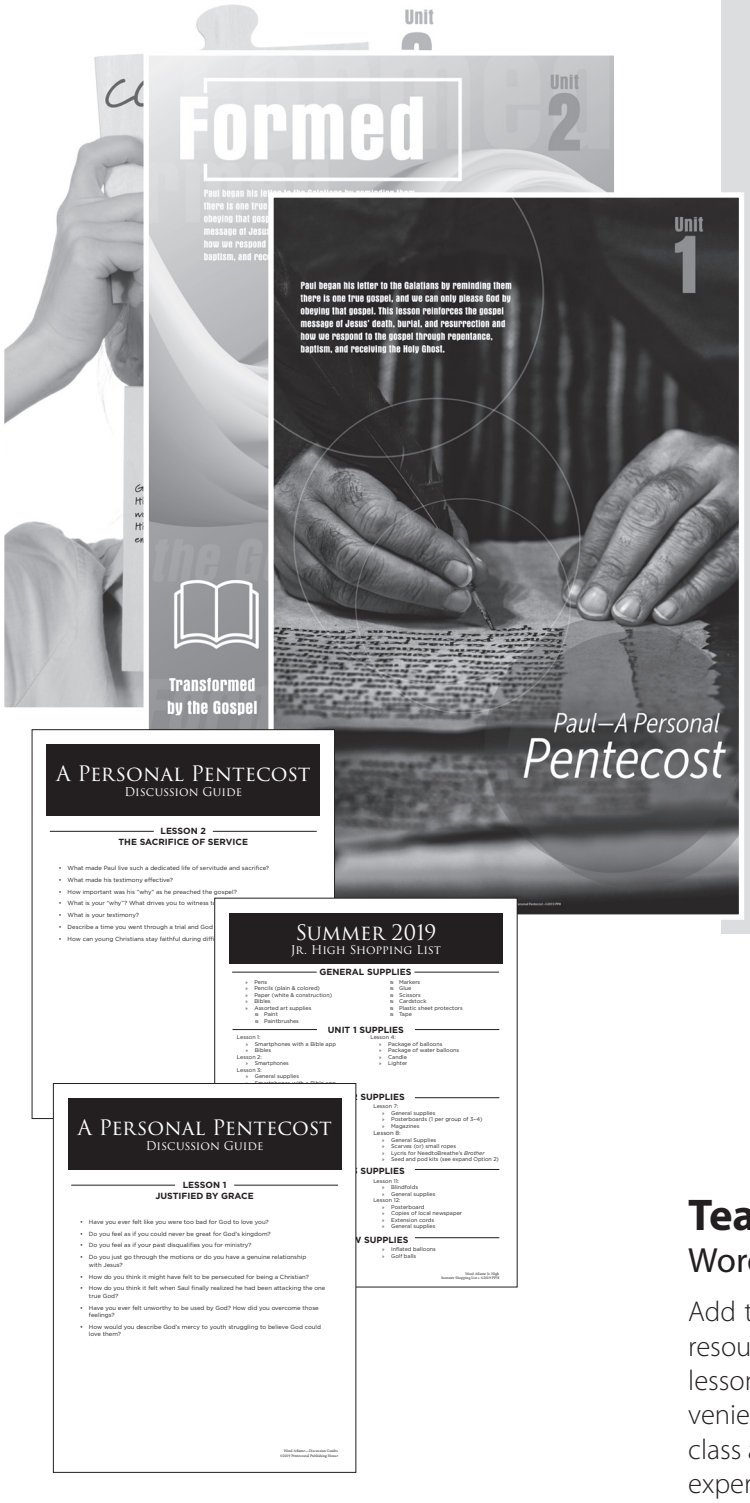

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Lesson 9
Face the Book
Week of August 2, 2020

Biblical Passage
Romans 1:16; II Timothy 2:15

Bible Point
One of the greatest barriers in sharing faith is the haunting question: what if someone asks me a question I cannot answer? This lesson shows how daily Bible study can help and provides a few key passages and subjects to help prepare us to be witnesses.

Supplies
Pens, Bibles (1 per student); *optional:* concordance; *optional:* Bible reading charts (1 per student); *optional:* create a chart to track students' Bible reading progress

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

Unit Aim: Jesus' final instruction to His disciples was to make disciples by sharing the good news of the gospel. This series invites us to get social with our faith by presenting practical tools to share the gospel with others.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion
1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. As Christians we know we are called to be disciple makers. Why is this so important?
3. What are some things that make being a witness difficult?
4. Have you ever been asked a question about the Bible that you did not know how to answer? What did you do?
5. Do you follow a daily Bible reading plan? If yes, what is it? If no, why not?

B. Option 2 — Bible Baseball
1. *For this activity you will need Bible trivia questions of varying difficulty. (You can find these online, download an app, or write them yourself).*
2. *Form two teams. Set up four chairs in the room as a baseball diamond. Sit in front of "home plate." Use a coin toss to choose which team goes first.*
3. *Each student gets a chance to be "at bat." When a student sits down at "home plate," that student can choose a single, double, triple, or home-run question. If the student answers the question correctly, the student advances the correct number of bases and sits down. If the student answers incorrectly, the student "struck out."*
4. *When a team receives three outs, the next team is "up to bat." Continue with as many innings as you would like. The team with the most points at the end wins.*

Explore

A. Introduction to the Series
1. Social media is here to stay and has completely revolutionized how we view our relationships and how we communicate. The Pew Research Center found it has redefined how we interact with our friends.
2. Although we have all experienced the negative effects of social media, it can also be a great resource to us as well. It allows us to:

a. stay connected to friends who have moved to different schools or cities,
b. keep in touch with out-of-town relatives,
c. meet people we otherwise would not meet,
d. experience events we may not be able to attend, and
e. the list goes on.

3. We share all kinds of things on social media, from our daily routine to funny memes to our opinions about current events.
4. **Of all the things we share, though, the most important thing—whether online or in person—is to get <u>social</u> about the gospel.**
5. In this series we will talk about how to obey the command of Scripture to share the gospel. We will learn practical tools we can use to reach people with whom we are already connected, sharing the message of all Jesus wants to do in their lives.

B. The Power of the Gospel

1. *Read Romans 1:16.*
2. There is absolutely nothing that transforms us like the gospel.
3. The gospel is more than just a neat story; it is the good news of Jesus dying on the cross, being buried, and rising again to set us free.
4. As Pentecostals we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, but that never would have happened without the gospel.
5. Unfortunately, many people hide their gospel experience. They are uncomfortable sharing their faith for a variety of reasons. While it will never be convenient to spread the gospel, we must understand that we are called to do so.
6. **We should not be <u>ashamed</u> of the gospel.** We must recognize it is worthwhile to overcome the discomfort of sharing our faith because of its power to change the lives of people we love.
7. What if we have never really witnessed to others before? Where do we start? We start in the place where the gospel speaks for itself: in the Word of God.

C. A Social Revolution

1. *Read II Timothy 2:15.*
2. One of the biggest game changers in contemporary culture was the rise of Facebook. While there are many popular social media apps and sites, this giant has been the largest for a long time. It is where social media evolved into what it is today.
3. Why is Facebook so popular? Because it gives us an opportunity to be "face-to-face" with people all over the world. We get to experience their daily lives, and they get to experience ours in return.
4. Much like our Facebook friends in other cities, states, or countries, we cannot sit down and look Jesus in the eyes. However, there is a Book that allows us to see Him "face-to-face" on a daily basis.

D. Getting into the Word

1. One of the reasons many people are insecure about sharing their faith is the simple fear they will be asked a question for which they do not have an answer. Perhaps the biggest reason we fear this is because we often do not spend enough time in the Bible to really understand and absorb it.
2. In the Scripture Paul told Timothy to approach the Word as a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed." What does this look like to you?
3. A workman who does not have to be ashamed:
   a. is diligent in tasks,
   b. pours great effort and energy into tasks,
   c. tries to do the best job possible instead of just doing enough to get by.
4. Just like we cannot expect to do our best on a test if we have not spent time studying, **we cannot expect to be able to succeed in sharing the gospel if we do not spend time <u>studying</u> the Bible**.

Activity — Sword Drill

1. *For this activity, it is best to notify students ahead of time to bring a physical copy of the Bible for this lesson. Alternately, you can most likely find a few extra copies at your local dollar store.*
2. *Form two teams. Pick some of your favorite Scriptures, and have an old-fashioned sword drill.*
   a. *Call out the verse reference.*
   b. *The first student to stand and read the verse earns a point for that team.*
3. *Use this activity to reinforce the importance of getting familiar with the Bible.*

E. Tools of the Trade

1. Can you imagine if your job was to dig ditches for a living, but you did not have a shovel? Or if you were a carpenter, but you did not have a saw? Or if you were a plumber, but you did not have a wrench?
2. **Part of being a good workman is using the right <u>tools</u>.** If we have the right tools in place, we can become effective studiers of the Word, which will, in turn, equip us to effectively share the gospel.
3. What are some of those tools?

F. Tool #1: Devotional Plan

1. **A <u>devotional</u> plan is simply a plan for our daily time with Jesus,** being intentional about what we do when we go before the Lord each day.
2. A good devotional plan should include:
   a. Prayer time—using a prayer guide or just speaking to Jesus from the heart,
   b. Bible reading time—reading the Bible with an open heart and mind,

c. Journaling time—writing down specific things we are thinking and feeling or revelations we received from prayer or Scripture.

G. Tool #2: Bible Reading Plan

1. **Using a Bible reading plan is an effective way to make sure our time in the Word is <u>focused</u>.**
2. There are several types of Bible reading plans. Two popular ones are:
   a. Bible-in-a-year programs (like the B.R.E.A.D. program),
   b. Topical programs (studying passages related to a specific topic—e.g., faith).

H. Tool #3: Dictionary and Concordance

1. We should not just gloss over words we do not understand. Download a dictionary and concordance app or use old-fashioned printed ones.
2. If you do not know how to use a concordance, reach out to a parent or a leader in the church. It can be a powerful tool for going deeper in the Word. *Consider showing students how to use one during class time.*

I. Tool #4: Books

1. If there is a Bible subject you want to understand better (e.g., the new birth or the gospel), consider reading a book on that subject. Visit Pentecostal Publishing House at pentecostalpublishing.com to find trustworthy resources authored by Apostolics.
2. Many of the questions we ask have already been asked before, and books on our doctrine will generally address most of those questions.

J. Tool #5: Spiritual Leadership

1. Sometimes we may have a very specific question about the Bible. There may be a passage that, no matter how much we study, we just cannot seem to understand. **Turning to a <u>spiritual leader</u> for answers to specific questions is very beneficial.**
2. The spiritual leaders in our lives (parents, pastor, Sunday school teachers, student pastor) love sharing the Word and would be honored to sit down with us and help us understand it better.

K. Tool #6: Why?

1. **Often one of the most effective tools in studying the Word is simply asking the question: <u>Why</u>?**
2. When something in the Bible catches your interest, ask yourself, "Why?"
   a. Why did Jesus die on the cross? (To pay the price for my sin)
   b. Why did He have to pay the price for my sin? (Without shedding of blood, there is no remission)
   c. Why do I battle sin in the first place? (Adam's fall)
   d. Why did Adam fall? . . . The questions go on and on and take you deeper and deeper into understanding.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Have a time of prayer, encouraging students to be "workmen" of the Word.*
2. *Pray that Jesus will reveal Himself to them in deeper ways as they pray and read the Bible. Pray that He will give them a passion for studying His Word.*

B. Option 2 — Bible Reading Chart

1. *Pass out a Bible reading plan to each student. You can use the B.R.E.A.D. program, a program from the internet, or a program from a Bible app.*
2. *Hang a chart on the wall (prepared ahead of time) where you will track each student's progress on the reading plan.*
3. *Consider a reward and recognition program to go along with the chart.*

Lesson 10
Be "Insta"
Week of August 9, 2020

Unit Aim: Jesus' final instruction to His disciples was to make disciples by sharing the good news of the gospel. This series invites us to get social with our faith by presenting practical tools to share the gospel with others.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Have you ever noticed that some people seem open to hearing about Jesus at some times but not at other times? Why do you think that is?
3. What moments in people's lives are good times to share the gospel?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where you knew in your gut you should share your faith, but you talked yourself out of it? What happened?
5. What are some things we can do to be prepared to share our faith "in an instant"?

B. Option 2 — Instagram Trends

1. *Do some research ahead of time and pick a popular Instagram hashtag trend to discuss (making sure it is clean). For example, some previously popular hashtags are: #MannequinChallenge, #FloorIsLava, #ColdWaterChallenge, #BottleFlipChallenge. Show a few examples from the hashtag to students.*
2. *Ask the following questions:*
   a. What do you think made this hashtag so successful?
   b. What do you think is the key to getting a lot of attention on a post?
   c. What are some ways you can use a popular hashtag to share your faith?

Explore

A. Review

1. Social media is one of the most popular forms of communication today. It can be an incredible resource for both positive and negative things, which shows the power of communication.
2. If there is anything about which we should "get social," it is the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Passage
II Timothy 4:2

Bible Point
Paul instructed us to be instant in season and out of season. Much of being a witness is taking advantage of moments when people are open. In this lesson we will explore how to identify and take advantage of those moments.

Supplies
Pens; *optional:* a Bible Quizzing buzzer system

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

3. To be effective at getting social about our faith, we must be students of the Word of God. Every day we need to approach our Bible as a workman, studying to be prepared to give answers when people ask us questions.
4. Some tools to help us are:
   a. a devotional plan,
   b. a Bible reading plan,
   c. a dictionary and a concordance,
   d. books on Bible subjects,
   e. spiritual leadership in our lives,
   f. a willingness to ask why.
5. As we study the Word, we can prepare ourselves to share our faith in an instant.

B. Insta-Famous

1. *Read II Timothy 4:2.*
2. Instagram is one of the most successful apps in history. As of the end of 2018, this photo-sharing app had over 500 million active members, who have shared over 40 billion photos. If you looked at each photo for just one second, it would take over 1,200 years to look at them all, and that number is going up every day.
3. From selfies to amateur photography to what you had for lunch, Instagram is a way to instantly share what is going on in your life with everyone with whom you are connected. Additionally, you can apply filters to present your photos in the most attractive way possible.
4. Some people have even obtained a measure of fame on Instagram. By sharing short clips or pictures of their adventures, they have gone viral.
5. The quickest way to go viral is by jumping on a trendy hashtag. Whether it is the #ColdWaterChallenge, #MannequinChallenge, #BottleFlipChallenge, or whatever challenge is coming up next, participating can attract people from literally all over the globe to your profile.
6. That is the whole premise of Instagram. You can share things instantly, and just as instantly, you can encounter your fifteen minutes of fame.

C. Insta-Witness

1. In the Scripture we read earlier, Paul instructed young Timothy to be "instant" about sharing the gospel. In other words, regardless of the circumstance in which he found himself, Timothy should always be ready to declare the Word of God.
2. Much of creating a successful Instagram post is being ready at a moment's notice, when the scene is right, when the lighting is good, and when the situation is perfect.
3. What if we looked just as carefully for an opportunity to share the gospel as we did for an opportunity for the next great selfie?

4. If your phone is tucked away when a photo opportunity arises, you may miss that perfect shot at an epic post. **If your witness is tucked away when the opportunity arises, you may miss that perfect shot at an opportunity to present someone with the story of Jesus Christ**.

D. Make the Moments Count

1. What was Paul talking about with Timothy? The concept is the same as finding Instagram success. While the moment may not always be right, we must always be prepared for when the moment is right.
2. We must pray, study, and prepare. Then we can take advantage of what may be a single moment in someone's life when something opens that person up to hearing the salvation message. **When you see that moment, be instant**.

Activity — Do Not Miss the Moment

1. *This activity works best if you have access to a Bible Quizzing buzzer system. (Alternatively, students can quickly stand or raise their hands.)*
2. *Select an even number of students, as few as two but no more than six.*
3. *Have half of the students on the red buzzers and the other half on the yellow buzzers. (Alternately, have half the students sit on one side of the room and the other half on the other side of the room.)*
4. *Ask each of these students to share a favorite superhero. You may want to write them down so you do not forget.*
5. *Call out the names of superheroes randomly. When students hear the name of their favorite hero, they buzz in on the buzzer system (or raise their hands or quickly stand up). The first team to ten points wins.*
6. *The Point:* We need to be actively paying attention for moments to share the gospel.

E. Identify Moments

1. **There are certain times in people's lives when they tend to be more open to hearing the gospel than at other times**:

   a. when they are actively exploring their faith,
   b. when they have experienced tragedy or crisis,
   c. when they are dealing with transition (e.g., moving, changing schools, parents separating, and so on),
   d. when their circle of friends changes.
2. These are good moments to lovingly step in, presenting the love of Jesus and showing how He can minister to their situation. We should not be confrontational or abrasive; we should show them a God who loves them and wants to walk through this season of their lives with them.

F. Be Self(ie)less

1. Selfies are about being the center of attention. Although our post may be about the background or the people with whom we are hanging out, the focus of the attention is on ourselves.
2. **If we are going to be instant in our faith, we must turn the attention away from <u>ourselves</u> and toward those we are trying to reach.** Only by demonstrating love and concern for others will doors open for us to help them explore their faith.

G. Hashtag the Conversation

1. What is the significance of a hashtag? It connects your post with others who are experiencing the same thing all over the world. It is how you fit into the bigger picture; it creates a sense of community.
2. When sharing your faith, you need to "hashtag" the conversation. **Find a way to connect others' <u>experiences</u> to scriptural truths or Bible stories that can build their faith.**
3. If you have a testimony you can share (yours or the testimony of someone you know) that is related to someone's situation, you can show how Jesus can help this person walk through and overcome this season of life.

H. Ditch the Filter

1. An Instagram filter is designed to improve a less-than-perfect picture. It takes something that is not quite what it should be and enhances it.
2. When we share our faith, sometimes we feel we need to put ourselves on a pedestal or present ourselves as if we have all the answers. We do not have to do that though. When we are honest about similar struggles we have faced, we show that Jesus' mercy is not just for perfect people; it is for people who feel their lives could use an Instagram filter as well.

I. Just Share It

1. So often when we want to post on Instagram, we take picture after picture and try filter after filter to make sure we get everything perfect before sharing it with the world.
2. Sometimes we feel we have to get everything just right in order to share our faith:
   a. It has to be the perfect situation.
   b. We must have the perfect words to say.
   c. We must have the perfect testimony.
3. However, **the most important thing about being instant in our faith is not getting everything right; it is just <u>sharing</u> it.** The trouble with a Latergram is the moment has already passed. Take advantage of the moment and, even if you fall all over your words, step out in faith and see what Jesus will do.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Have a time of prayer, encouraging your students to be "instant" in their witness.*
2. *Pray that Jesus will open their eyes to see moments this week when they can step in and share the gospel with others.*

B. Option 2 — Connecting People to Jesus

1. *Form four groups. Assign one of the following scenarios to each group.*
   a. Your friend just moved to a new city and feels alone.
   b. Your friend is being bullied by others in school.
   c. Your friend's parents are separating, and he feels hurt and rejected.
   d. Your friend just lost a loved one.
2. *Each group should come up with a Scripture or Bible story they can use to connect their scenario to Jesus.*
3. *Once everyone is finished, allow each group to present their findings.*

Lesson 11

Share Your Story

Week of August 16, 2020

Biblical Passage

I Corinthians 2:1

Bible Point

Like the social media craze of "stories" (thirty-second bites that let us into the lives of the broadcasters), we will explore ways we can share our testimony—our story.

Supplies

Pens; *optional:* smartphones with Instagram accounts (1 per small group)

Legend:

PowerPoint Slide

Student Handbook

Activity

Unit Aim: Jesus' final instruction to His disciples was to make disciples by sharing the good news of the gospel. This series invites us to get social with our faith by presenting practical tools to share the gospel with others.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. What does it mean to testify?
3. Have you ever been asked to testify before (in church, Sunday school, or another setting)? What was that experience like?
4. Why is sharing our testimony such an important part of being a Christian?
5. Are some testimonies better than others? Why or why not?

B. Option 2 — Instagram Story Scavenger Hunt

1. *Form groups of four or more. Make sure each group has at least one person who uses Instagram and a smartphone with access to Instagram.*
2. *The challenge is to find as many of the items listed below as possible using only Instagram stories of accounts to which group members are connected (no searching). The group that finds the most items wins.*
   a. A boomerang video
   b. A picture or video using a filter
   c. A picture or video using a popular hashtag
   d. A stunt video
   e. A foodie picture or video
   f. A church event or promo picture or video
   g. A picture or video from a UPCI division (e.g., Youth Ministries, North American Missions, Project 7, and so on)
   h. A group picture or video of students in the youth group
   i. A picture or video with a pet

Explore

A. Review

1. Social media is one of the most popular forms of communication today. It can be an incredible resource for both positive and negative things. In either case, it shows the power of communication.

2. If there is anything about which we should "get social," it is the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. Part of being an effective witness is taking advantage of moments. To do this, we must be instant. When someone is open to hearing about Jesus, that is the moment we need to be bold and declare the gospel.
4. To do this effectively, we must
    a. identify moments,
    b. be self(ie)less,
    c. hashtag the conversation,
    d. ditch the filter,
    e. just share.
5. When the moment arrives, what do we share? We can and should share the gospel, but we must also be ready to share our story.

B. Social Media Stories

1. *Read I Corinthians 2:1.*
2. First there was Snapchat, then there was Vine, and next there was Instagram Stories. Stories are quick, short pictures and videos that are around for twenty-four hours, and then they disappear. Now they have spread to other social media platforms as well.
3. Stories can be about anything:
    a. with whom you are hanging out,
    b. what you are eating,
    c. something funny you saw on the side of the road,
    d. a rant,
    e. a promotion, and so on.
4. Why do people use stories instead of just posting on their feed? Because stories get people's attention. They show up at the very top of the feed and immediately grab people's attention. It is so hard to resist the temptation to click on them, and once you start looking at a person's story, you may feel compelled to look at all of them.

C. You Have a Story

1. **Every single one of us has a <u>story</u>.** Just as the gospel is the story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, our testimony is our story of how we came to receive and be transformed by the gospel.
2. Just as every social media story is unique to the individual, so every person's testimony is unique.
    a. Perhaps you were struggling with a particular sin issue, and Jesus set you free.
    b. Perhaps you are the only person in your family who lives for Jesus.
    c. Perhaps you grew up in church, but you got distracted by the world and then found your way back to Jesus.
    d. Perhaps you have grown up in church your whole life and have always tried to live for Jesus.
3. Regardless of what your story may be, you most certainly have one.

D. The Power of Your Story

1. Have you ever wanted to post a story on social media, but you felt it was not good enough compared to your friends' stories?
2. **Social media tends to feed our natural desire to <u>compare</u> ourselves to each other.** We can look at what others are broadcasting and feel like what we have to express simply does not measure up. However, Paul warned us in II Corinthians 10:12 not to compare ourselves to each other. Jesus values each one of us equally.
3. The Book of Revelation tells us we overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (Revelation 12:11). The shedding of His blood is what Jesus did to defeat the devil and set us free. The word of our testimony is our response to that freedom.
4. No matter how you feel your story compares to others, there is power in it, because it set you free. And if there was power in it to set you free, it can help set others free too.
5. **People can argue with you about what the Bible says, but they cannot argue with you about what you have <u>experienced</u>.** There is power in your experience.

Activity — Pass Around Stories

1. *Have students sit in a large circle.*
2. *Inform students that they will "pass" around a story; when it comes to them, they are to add to the story by sharing two sentences.*
3. *Begin a story from your own imagination, sharing only two sentences. Then "pass" the story to your right. Students continue in this manner around the circle. This may get wild and silly, so consider your group and establish any necessary ground rules ahead of time.*
4. *The Point: Stories have power, and they are memorable.*

E. Loading Story . . .

1. You have probably seen plenty of social media stories where someone just randomly turned the camera on or snapped a picture that was not very exciting. You have also probably seen some really good stories where you could tell the people posting really thought about what they wanted to say or show.
2. **The difference between a boring story and a good story is having something <u>meaningful</u> to express.** The same is true of our testimony. There is nothing wrong with preparing ahead of time for what you will say if you have an opportunity to share your testimony. In fact, I Peter 3:15 encourages us to have an answer when people ask us about our faith.
3. What are some things to think about when preparing to tell your story?

F. Paul's Story

1. In the Book of Acts, we read about Paul being arrested and put through a series of trials. His goal was ultimately to appeal to Caesar so he could share the gospel with him.
2. As Paul went through each of his trials, he told his testimony. Each time, he told it the same basic way.
   a. He started by talking about his past.
   b. He shared the moment he met Jesus.
   c. He explained how meeting Jesus changed his life.
   d. He encouraged his audience to seek that same experience.
3. Paul's approach is a good template for us to use to structure our own stories.

G. Talk about Your Past

1. You do not have to get into private details, but **it is okay to admit how <u>lost</u> you were when Jesus found you**.
2. Express what it was about your life that made you feel empty or dissatisfied. In other words, explain why you wanted to leave your past and find something better.
3. If you grew up in church, you may feel you do not have anything to share, but think deeper. We all have a reason we turned to Jesus, and no matter how simple that reason may seem, it will minister to other people.

H. Talk about Meeting Jesus

1. Do you remember the day you decided you wanted to serve Jesus (the day you realized He was the answer to your situation)? Maybe you received the Holy Ghost or were baptized that same day. Maybe you were not. Either way, **talk about the <u>moment</u> that was the turning point for you**.
2. How did you respond? How did it feel? Did it feel like a weight was lifted off your shoulders? Like someone cleaned you from the inside out? Was it at church? At youth camp? Somewhere else?
3. Try to avoid words that most people who are not in church would not understand (like anointing, revival, tongues, and so on).

I. Talk about How Jesus Changed You

1. When we are filled with the Spirit and baptized, a change takes place deep inside of us. We felt it the moment it happened, and we seek to live that out every day of our lives.
2. Talk about that difference in your life. How do you live differently than you did before you met Jesus? How do you feel about your life now versus your life then?
3. Living for Jesus is not painful; it is beautiful. **Do not be afraid to let other people see your <u>joy</u>**.

J. Invite Others to Experience Jesus

1. **The whole point of our testimony is to lead others to Jesus.** Once you have shared what Jesus has done for you, invite your audience to respond.
2. Remember, you are not responsible for whether or not others receive the gospel. Take the pressure off yourself. You are simply telling a story; whether others "like" it or not is between them and God.

EXPAND

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Have a time of prayer, encouraging your students to be bold in sharing their testimonies.*
2. *Pray that Jesus will give them the words to say when they have an opportunity to share their stories.*

B. Option 2 — Testimony Practice

1. *Practicing sharing our testimonies with people who love and support us can make it much easier to share in other settings as well.*
2. *Form groups of two. In each group, students should take turns sharing their testimonies.*
3. *At the end, bring the class together for a question-and-answer session. (Allow them to ask any questions they have about sharing their faith.)*

Lesson 12
Retweet
Week of August 23, 2020

Unit Aim: Jesus' final instruction to His disciples was to make disciples by sharing the good news of the gospel. This series invites us to get social with our faith by presenting practical tools to share the gospel with others.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Discussion

1. *Instruct teens to use their student handbooks for this exercise.*
2. Is teaching Bible studies important? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever been taught a Bible study? What was that like?
4. What topics do you think a Bible study should cover?
5. Have you ever tried to teach a Bible study? How did it go?

B. Option 2 — Bible Story Challenge

1. *Assemble a collection of random items (from around the room or brought from home). Then select several Bible stories that are familiar to your students and write them down on separate slips of paper. Place these in a bag.*
2. *Form groups of four. Each group will select a random item and then pull a paper slip from the bag. Once everyone has chosen, inform the groups of what they will be doing.*
3. *Each group will act out the Bible story chosen; the catch is they must find some way to incorporate the item they selected.*
4. *Allow time for groups to prepare before they act out their stories.*

Explore

A. Review

1. Social media is one of the most popular forms of communication today. It can be an incredible resource for both positive and negative things. In either case, it shows the power of communication.
2. If there is anything about which we should "get social," it is the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
3. If we are going to be effective witnesses for Jesus, we must be comfortable sharing our stories. Our testimony is telling how the gospel impacted our lives personally.
4. When we share our testimony, we
   a. explain what our past was like before Jesus,
   b. share the moment we met Jesus,

Biblical Passage
Romans 10:17

Bible Point
Retweeting is sharing someone else's words. Similarly, teaching a Bible study is all about allowing the Word of God to speak for itself. In this lesson we will share practical principles for giving a basic Bible study.

Supplies
Paper, pens, at least two smartphones; *optional:* random items (from classroom or home), slips of paper, bag; *optional:* copies of a one-lesson Bible study such as Bible Study in a Bag (1 per student)

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

c. explain how Jesus changed us,
d. tell our audience why they should experience Jesus too.

5. Once their hearts are open to hear, we must use that opportunity to connect them to the Word of God. In other words, it is time for a Bible study.

B. Tweet, Tweet

1. *Read Romans 10:17.*
2. Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms available today. It is considered a micro-blog, where people document their lives in no more than 280 characters per post. The entire goal of Twitter is to say something meaningful as concisely as possible.
3. Because of the character-length requirement, the cleverest posts (called tweets) can be incredibly quotable. If you see a tweet you really like, you can share it using the retweet feature.
4. When you retweet something, it will share the original author's exact words. It will also give the author credit for the tweet. Those who follow you and see the retweet and like it can then follow the author and see what else this person has to say.

C. Retweeting Jesus

1. This is very similar to what we do when we share the Word of God in a Bible study. **While sharing our testimony is sharing how the gospel impacted us, sharing Scripture allows Jesus to speak for Himself.**
2. As we share Scripture with our friends and loved ones, they have an opportunity to see the thoughts, feelings, and heartbeat of the Author. We can tell them about Jesus, but when they read the Bible, they get to see what Jesus has to say about Himself.
3. In fact, as we read earlier, this is the only real way we can bring people into faith. People must be exposed to the Bible if they are going to have an opportunity to believe it.

D. The Responsibility of the Message

1. Why is the original author included in a retweet? Because the author is the one who owns the quote. If you retweet something and someone does not like it, you can point back to the original author. After all, the tweet was not yours; you were just sharing it.
2. Similarly, when we share the Word of God with others, we must remember these are not our words. If someone does not like what the Bible says, you can point them to the Author. As a result, **we are not responsible for whether someone receives the message; we are only responsible for being willing to share it.**

E. Too Young?

1. Many students feel they are simply too young to teach a Bible study.
2. If you feel that way, there may be many reasons.

a. Perhaps the only person you have ever seen teach a Bible study is an adult.
b. Perhaps the charts and lesson guides for most Bible studies are intimidating to you.
c. Perhaps you have been asked a question about the Bible that you could not answer.
d. Perhaps you think a Bible study has to be something long or formal.
e. Perhaps you have another reason entirely.

3. The truth, though, is that all of us who are disciples of Jesus are called to go and make other disciples by teaching them the Word of God (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47). **You are not too <u>young</u> to teach a Bible study**. If you have been baptized in the name of Jesus and filled with His Spirit, you have everything you need to be an effective witness.

Activity — Never Too Young

1. *Form two groups. Make sure each group has at least one smartphone, paper, and a pen.*
2. *Challenge students to do a Google search for "people under 18 who started their own companies."*
3. *Have each group pick a person they find particularly interesting. Then have them answer the following questions:*
4. *Who is the person?*
5. *What kind of business did this person start?*
6. *How much money does this business make?*
7. *Have you heard of the business before?*
8. *What inspires you about this story?*
9. *The Point: We do not have to be adults to accomplish big things.*

F. Start at the Beginning

1. You may say, "I would love to teach a Bible study, but I have no idea where to start."
2. A good place to start is always at the beginning. Sometimes we can get discouraged trying to figure out every step, but the most important step is the first one. Once we take that step of faith and offer a Bible study to someone, then we can keep taking steps of faith as the Lord leads us.
3. Understanding that every Bible study is as unique as the person being taught, there are still some basic guidelines we can follow to help make the process a little easier.

G. Attend a Bible Study

1. **If you have never been to a Bible study, <u>go</u> to one**. Sitting through one can give you confidence that it is not as intimidating to teach one as you may think.

2. Consider asking if you can go along the next time a Bible study teacher at your church teaches a Bible study.
3. If no one at your church is currently teaching a Bible study, consider getting with a spiritual leader in the church whom you trust (or your parents, if they are in church) and asking that person to teach you a personal Bible study.

H. Pick Out a Bible Study

1. There are many good in-depth Bible studies you can teach. Many are available through Pentecostal Publishing House, such as *Exploring God's Word*. In addition to these great resources, **there are also several effective <u>one-lesson</u> Bible studies you can teach**. These studies typically jump right into the plan of salvation. Some examples are:
   a. *Bible Study in a Bag* (geared toward teenagers),
   b. *New Birth Experience*,
   c. *Into His Marvelous Light*.
2. You can find one-lesson Bible studies at Pentecostal Publishing House as well.

I. Teach the Bible Study to Someone in Church

1. **Teaching a Bible study to someone who is already in <u>church</u> is a great way to get the nervousness out and get some honest feedback on areas you can improve**.
2. You can teach a peer, a parent, a sibling, or even one of the leaders in your church.
3. It is a good idea to teach the Bible study in a public place (like a coffee shop or restaurant). This will help you get comfortable talking about the Word of God outside of church.

J. Teach the Bible Study to Someone Not in Church

1. The easiest way to set up a Bible study is to simply ask, "Are you interested in learning more about the Bible?" After all, if we never make the offer, we may avoid rejection, but we also do not give people a chance to say yes.
2. You may be nervous your first time, and that is okay. **<u>Faith</u> is not the absence of fear; it is setting fear aside and trusting Jesus anyway**.
3. If it would make you more comfortable, consider inviting a spiritual leader in your church to attend the Bible study.
4. If someone asks a question you cannot answer, just be honest and admit you do not know the answer. Then do some studying or ask someone you trust for the answer.
5. At the end of it all, whether you feel the Bible study goes well or not, give Jesus praise and take confidence in the fact that you have been obedient to His Word. Jesus never called us to have results; He simply called us to be willing to do His work.

Expand

A. Option 1 — Prayer

1. *Have a time of prayer, encouraging your students to pray that God will give them the boldness to teach Bible studies.*
2. *Then pray for God to open doors for students to find people interested in a Bible study.*

B. Option 2 — Practice What You Preach

1. *Hand out a copy of a simple one-lesson Bible study to each member of the class (e.g., Bible Study in a Bag, New Birth Experience, and so on).*
2. *Give students a few minutes to read over the Bible study.*
3. *Then pair students up. Each student will teach half of the Bible study to the other student.*
4. *Once everyone is finished, bring the group together and answer any questions they may have.*

Lesson 13
Influencers and Our Influences
Week of August 30, 2020

Biblical Passage
Romans 8:1; Romans 1:16; II Timothy 2:15; Jonah 1:1–3

Bible Point
In order for us to truly forgive and reach others, we must first find ourselves and accept the forgiveness, mercy, and grace that God has set aside for us. Only then can we use the tools we have been given to effectively evangelize, reach, and love the lost the way that God intended.

Supplies
Party snacks (optional), empty cereal boxes, disposable cups, balloons, uncooked penne pasta noodles

Legend:
- PowerPoint Slide
- Student Handbook
- Activity

Big Idea: This quarter focused on forgiveness and its impact on our lifestyle when we overcome harboring wrong feelings against others. We also explored the story of Jonah and its connection to the themes of God's love and forgiveness even in spite of our mistakes. This led us to the social aspect of sharing the gospel, loving people, and using practical tools to reach the lost.

Embark

A. Option 1 — Review Party
1. *Consider having party snacks or other food as celebration for a completed quarter.*
2. *Create a sign-up sheet for students to bring something to eat and share.*
3. *Allow a time for fellowship. Sit, talk, and laugh with your students to break up the normal routine.*
4. *Consider making this a habit for the final lesson of each quarter; it gives students something to look forward to and may even encourage those who are not always consistent in attendance.*
5. *(Be sure to get approval for all food and activities from your pastor and parents first so as not to be surprised by food allergies or anything of the sort.)*

B. Option 2 — Reaching Out
1. *Sunday school is a place for growth and learning and, with older classes, a transition is expected sooner rather than later.*
2. *Consider that students begin to age out and are often caught in an awkward stage transitioning from Sunday school to a main service or Bible teaching program. This can cause rifts in learning or confusion for young adults about how they are expected to act.*
3. *Since most other levels are also currently reviewing or throwing some sort of party, consider asking students to volunteer to serve in other classes, so they can learn what it is like to help and teach a Sunday school class themselves.*
4. *While it is not necessary, this may fill a void or burden students may not have realized they had or, at the very least, open up opportunities for ministry from one student to another.*
5. *There is no better way to learn than through hands-on experience. If you feel your class is capable of aiding in the teaching of lower levels, this may be a key time to educate your class on mentorship and the importance of character, as well as the basics of teaching and caring for younger children.*

C. Option 3—Minute to Win It

1. *If you choose not to go the route of aiding other classes, here are some Minute to Win It game options that go well with the idea of a review party.*
2. Breakfast Scramble:
    a. *Collect a few empty cereal boxes. Cut off the front of each box and cut it into at least sixteen pieces. For increased difficulty cut it into thirty-two or more pieces.*
    b. *Have students situated with their own cut-up box cover pieces in front of them.*
    c. *Students must assemble the box cover like a puzzle in the allotted time. The first to finish or the closest to completion at the end of time is the winner.*
3. Balloon Blow
    a. *Have a deflated balloon for each participant. Set up ten disposable cups in the middle of a table or flat surface for each student as well.*
    b. *The purpose of the game is to use the balloons to blow the cups off the table. Students must inflate the balloons and release the air to achieve this.*
    c. *Add or subtract cups to adjust the difficulty.*
4. Noodling Around:
    a. *Position six uncooked penne noodles around the edge of a table. Students will attempt to pick up all the noodles using an uncooked piece of spaghetti in their mouth.*
    b. *The goal of the game is to pick up all the pieces the fastest.*
    c. *Multiple people can attempt this at once at separate tables, or time each one and use the completion times to determine a winner.*
5. *Other options for games can be found by searching the Internet for "Minute to Win It Games."*

EXPLORE

A. The Importance of Giving (and Receiving) Forgiveness

1. **Many things about living for Jesus are simply not natural. In fact, our human nature is often our greatest obstacle when it comes to moving forward in our Christian walk.**
    a. There is nothing natural about denying ourselves. If you don't believe me, set a bowl of candy out and try not to eat any all week long.
    b. There is nothing natural about taking up your cross. Very few people will intentionally pick a path they know will result in pain.
    c. There is nothing natural about following Jesus. Truthfully, our human nature does not want to follow anyone other than ourselves.
    d. Forgiveness is most difficult because it digs up buried emotions and pulls out pain that we have pushed away to the back of the closet.

2. **Sometimes the hardest person to forgive is <u>yourself</u>.**
   a. We expect more out of ourselves. We often require ourselves to be perfect.
   b. Unfortunately, that is lofty and unattainable. Scripture calls us to turn from sin and live transformed lives (Romans 6:4), but Scripture also recognizes there is a maturing process (II Peter 3:18). We do not get there overnight.
   c. If you are holding yourself accountable for past failings, stop. Embrace the mercy and grace Jesus has for you. Forgive yourself; give yourself a second chance.
3. We can forgive others by extending Jesus' grace to them, even if we feel they do not deserve it.
4. *Read Luke 18:1–7.*
5. When someone wrongs us or hurts us, our natural inclination is toward retribution. We want the person to pay for the crime against us. This sounds like justice, but it often stretches beyond the borders of justice into retaliation.
   a. Since Jesus is the only true judge, He has called us to relinquish retribution to Him. He is the only standard of justice, so to take matters into our own hands is to tell Him, "I don't trust You to make things right; I have to do it myself."
   b. We are called to accept (as a matter of faith) that Jesus, whose ways are above our ways and whose thoughts are above our thoughts, has a better plan than we do.
   c. Forgiving others means letting go of the pain, but it also means letting go of payback for the wrong that was done.
6. *Read Luke 23:34.*
7. While in a literal sense Jesus has never done anything wrong and therefore requires no forgiveness, we have all experienced times when He did not move how or when we wanted. In this lesson we will discuss letting go of any offenses we may hold toward God and trusting Him to be sovereign in our lives.
   a. So where do we go from here? If we have lost faith in Jesus because of pain we have experienced, how can we let go of that pain and be reconciled to Him? These specific steps can help us on this journey.
   b. Express our frustrations to Jesus.
   c. Release Jesus of all perceived debt.
   d. Reaffirm our faith.
   e. Trust Jesus to be sovereign and allow Him to work all things for your good.
   f. Give Jesus your trust. He did not die for you so you could live a miserable life. He loves you, and He wants the very best for you.

- **Have you ever prayed about something but Jesus did not answer the way you hoped? How did you feel about it?**
- **Have you ever been frustrated with God? Why or why not?**
- **How do we learn to trust God, even when He does not do what we want?**

B. The Power of Social Media

1. *Read Romans 1:16.*
2. **Although we have all experienced the negative effects of social media, it can also be a great <u>resource</u> to us as well.**
   a. We share all kinds of things on social media, from our daily routine to funny memes to our opinions about current events.
   b. Of all the things we share, though, the most important thing—whether online or in person—is to get social about the gospel.
   c. The gospel is more than just a neat story; it is the good news of Jesus dying on the cross, being buried, and rising again to set us free.
   d. We must recognize it is worthwhile to overcome the discomfort of sharing our faith because of its power to change the lives of people we love.
3. Paul instructed young Timothy to be "instant" about sharing the gospel. In other words, regardless of the circumstance in which he found himself, Timothy should always be ready to declare the Word of God.
   a. What was Paul talking about with Timothy? The concept is the same as finding Instagram success. While the moment may not always be right, we must always be prepared for when the moment is right.
   b. We must pray, study, and prepare. Then we can take advantage of what may be a single moment in someone's life when something opens that person up to hearing the salvation message.
   c. Only by demonstrating love and concern for others will doors open for us to help them explore their faith.
   d. Take advantage of the moment and, even if you fall all over your words, step out in faith and see what Jesus will do.
4. Every single one of us has a story. Just as the gospel is the story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, our testimony is our story of how we came to receive and be transformed by the gospel.
   a. Just as every social media story is unique to the individual, so every person's testimony is unique.
   b. Regardless of what your story may be, you most certainly have one.
   c. We can look at what others are broadcasting and feel like what we have to express simply does not measure up. However, Paul warned us in II Corinthians 10:12 not to compare ourselves to each other. Jesus values each one of us equally.

   d. **No matter how you feel your story compares to others, there is power in it, because it set you free. And if there was power in it to set you free, it can help set others free too. There is power in your experience.**

5. Twitter is one of the most popular social media platforms available today. It is considered a micro-blog, where people document their lives in no more than 280 characters per post. The entire goal of Twitter is to say something meaningful as concisely as possible.
   a. This is very similar to what we do when we share the Word of God in a Bible study. While sharing our testimony is sharing how the gospel impacted us, sharing Scripture allows Jesus to speak for Himself.
   b. As we share Scripture with our friends and loved ones, they have an opportunity to see the thoughts, feelings, and heartbeat of the Author. We can tell them about Jesus, but when they read the Bible, they get to see what Jesus has to say about Himself.
   c. All of us who are disciples of Jesus are called to go and make other disciples by teaching them the Word of God (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47).
   d. If you have been baptized in the name of Jesus and filled with His Spirit, you have everything you need to be an effective witness.
6. A good place to start is always at the beginning. Sometimes we can get discouraged trying to figure out every step, but the most important step is the first one. Once we take that step of faith and offer a Bible study to someone, then we can keep taking steps of faith as the Lord leads us.
   a. **Understanding that every Bible study is as unique as the person being taught, there are still some basic guidelines we can follow to help make the process a little easier.**
   b. If no one at your church is currently teaching a Bible study, consider getting with a spiritual leader in the church whom you trust (or your parents, if they are in church) and asking that person to teach you a personal Bible study.
   c. You can teach a peer, a parent, a sibling, or even one of the leaders in your church.
   d. If someone asks a question you cannot answer, just be honest and admit you do not know the answer. Then do some studying or ask someone you trust for the answer.
   e. At the end of it all, whether you feel the Bible study goes well or not, give Jesus praise and take confidence in the fact that you have been obedient to His Word. Jesus never called us to have results; He simply called us to be willing to do His work.

- **Have you ever been taught a Bible study? What was that experience like?**
- **What are some ways we misuse social media?**
- **How can we be effective witnesses, both on social media and in person?**
- **Why are people skills just as important as the skills in putting together a good-looking post?**

C. Into the Depths of God's Love, Mercy, and Grace

1. *Read Jonah 1:1–3.*
2. **The author linked Tarshish with getting as far away from the presence of the Lord as possible, indicating Jonah was trying to <u>escape</u>.**
   a. The people of Nineveh were idolatrous and cruel. As enemies of Israel, they were a hated people. If there were a place where God's grace was least expected and most needed, it was Nineveh.
   b. Jonah did not want to go where God was telling him to go. Jonah was very deliberate in avoiding the place God was sending him because he knew the character of God.
   c. Those places where we think God is least likely to be, where we think God's grace is least likely to delve, those places that harbor the vilest of human sin—God is OK there, and He wants to be with us when we go there. God is not surprised, offended, or afraid of any of these places.
   d. Experiencing the peace and presence of God and seeing His grace at work in our lives is directly connected to our willingness to turn toward and face the darkness in our world.
3. God was moving Jonah, and God is moving us to the realization that the peace, presence, and joy of God are not circumstantial.
   a. Only when we let go of the surface or circumstantial joy and travel into the dark places can we discover a light, a joy, and a peace that are powerful enough to sustain us beyond our circumstances.
   b. God is telling us that the joy we feel in Tarshish is not absent in Nineveh; it is very much alive. Ocean deep, abiding joy is not found in a place but in His presence, and He is everywhere.
4. *Read Jonah 1:4–17; 2.*
   a. The narrator of Jonah used Jonah's actions and reactions, and the actions and reactions of the sailors, to highlight something of apparent value.
   b. Jonah refused to go and deliver God's message, thus removing the chance for life for others.
5. **In the Book of Jonah, we do not find a restless, nervous, fretting God. We find a God who is present in the <u>storm</u>, and when that presence is acknowledged, there is a peace that surpasses the storm.**
   a. God carries the weightiest part of our lives.

b. God is not looking for superhuman efforts; in fact, if we ever do anything in this life, it is because of His efforts on our behalf.
c. The efforts of those healed by Jesus in the New Testament were miniscule—hand stretching, eye washing, taking up their beds and walking.
d. Salvation, deliverance, and healing are not produced by our efforts but by Jesus' grace.
e. Remember: extraordinary things can be accomplished when we place our lives and efforts in Jesus' hands.

6. Since God's nature encompasses infinite love, instead of looking for ways not to forgive us, He is reaching for us and looking for ways to extend forgiveness.
   a. Jonah's efforts to create a place of comfort only left him miserable, but God brought him the comfort he needed without even being asked.
   b. When our lives are self-serving, self-seeking, and self-centered, our efforts will only leave us miserable, no matter how well-intentioned.
   c. **Sometimes we are more worried about our <u>standard</u> of living in this world than we are about living by the extravagant, forgiving, loving standards of God's world.**

- **Have you ever had someone pull a prank on you? What happened?**
- **Have you ever seen someone get angry from a prank? What happened?**
- **Have you ever been angry because you felt someone did not get a punishment that was deserved? Why?**

D. Tying It All Together

1. Before we can ever move out into the world and share the message of love and forgiveness that Jesus brought the world, we must first find meaning for that story for ourselves.
   a. God loves you.
   b. God has given you forgiveness.
   c. Your past is your past, and with Jesus, it is far behind you. It no longer rules you or determines who you are.
   d. Because of Jesus, you are a new creature with a new life and a bright future.
2. We are helpless to help others until we have helped ourselves. When we give into our past mistakes, we let the enemy win, and we glorify the sin that once ruled our lives. When we embrace Jesus fully, we have the hope that we will never be the same and that our testimony will be our greatest tool in reaching the lost and the broken.

3. We have been given other tools of course, but when paired with our testimony, the Bible promises that we will be successful in building relationships and connecting with those that have dealt with the same things that we did.
    a. **When we embrace our testimony, we are given <u>power</u> over <u>sin</u>.**
    b. When we embrace our testimony, we open doors to the lost.
    c. When we embrace our testimony, we have the power to make a difference in the lives of everyone we meet.
4. It is important that we use every tool at our disposal to help others; to share the gospel with others.
5. But more than anything, we should see that the gospel is for everyone, even the people you can't imagine reaching for.
    a. Your bully needs Jesus.
    b. The local homeless need Jesus.
    c. Every person of every color and culture needs Jesus.
6. **We can't let our feelings ever get in the way, because when we didn't deserve Jesus, He still <u>reached</u> for us.**
7. Jesus' love covers us all, completely, and there is nothing we can do to escape it. He wants everyone to know that love is for them too. Share the love of Jesus with everyone you meet; show His love in your actions and charity. When you do this, I promise your life will be fulfilled like never before, and every life you touch will be changed forever.

Expand

A. Option 1—Prayer

1. *Take time to consider what this quarter has been about.*
2. *Allow students time to express their thoughts about relationships and their purpose and calling.*
3. *You know your students best, so gather them appropriately for corporate prayer.*
4. *Do not be afraid to minister to individuals you feel are being touched by the Spirit.*
5. *Pray specifically for direction and strength in each student's life.*

B. Option 2—Discussion

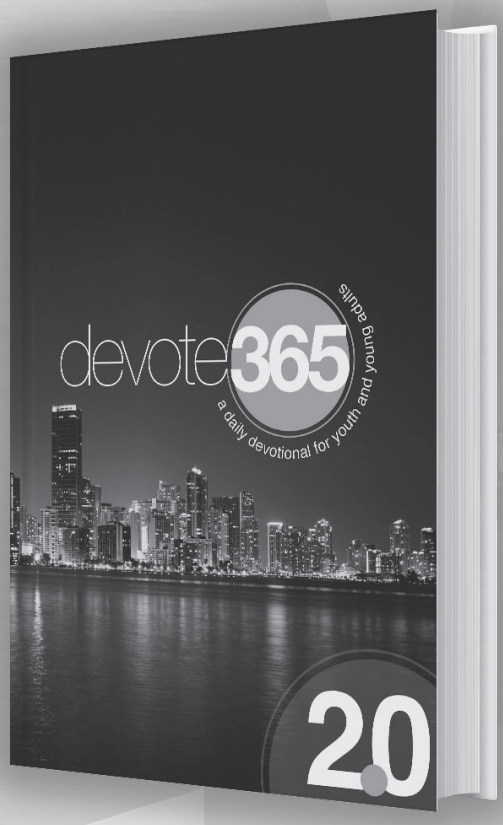
1. *Review topics from the quarter.*
    a. What is the difference between mercy and grace?
    b. Why is it important that we understand the difference when dealing with other people who have wronged you?
    c. Why do we first have to forgive ourselves before we can properly love and forgive others?
2. *Ask students to describe the best ways to use social media to reach others.*
3. *Alternatively, ask what our life should look like on social media? What rules should we use when we post updates and highlights?*

4. *Finally ask them about their relationships and how they can connect to others on a spiritual level.*
    a. Have you ever made a judgement that someone didn't want or need Jesus?
    b. Why is this dangerous?
5. *Ask them how they can go about impacting those around them, rather than allowing others to impact them.*
    a. What was Jonah's biggest flaw?
    b. Did he ever fix his issues?
    c. How can we avoid the mistakes that Jonah made?

C. Option 3—Challenge

1. *This is a refresher of a challenge used in past lessons. Use this as a time to reacquaint your students with this challenge and check on their status.*
2. *Challenge students to intentionally give of themselves for the next three months.*
    a. *Spend time with an elder in the church or invite a visitor to have coffee with them.*
    b. *Drop what they are doing the next time a friend who needs help calls.*
    c. *Introduce someone to Jesus Christ.*
3. *If students have been successful, urge them to continue.*
4. *If they have been struggling, offer ways they can be more effective and consistent.*
5. *Hold students accountable throughout the time period and create a big night at the conclusion for them to share their stories and the impact made in their lives and the lives of others.*

How will you devote?



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Joshua B. Carson
General Youth President, UPCI

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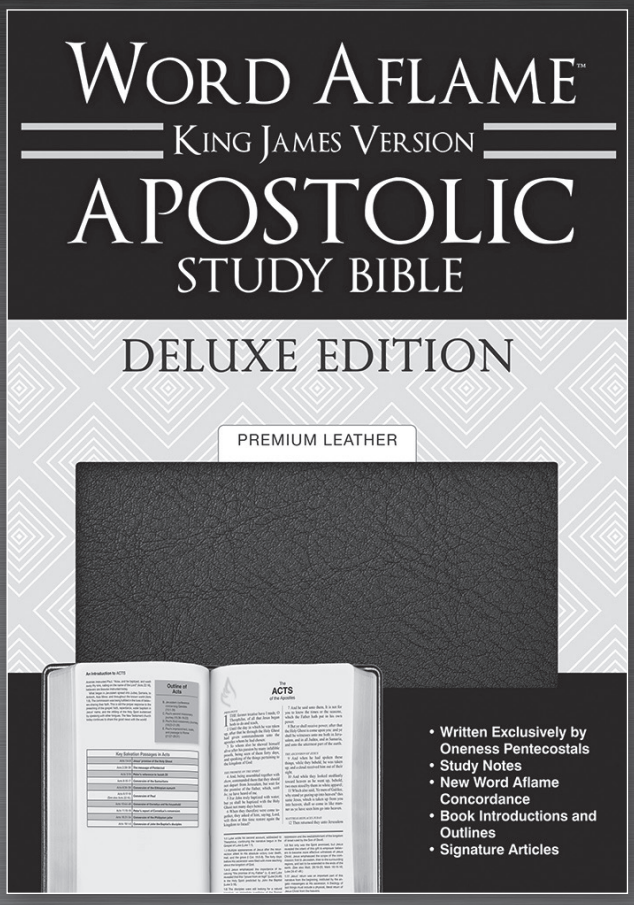

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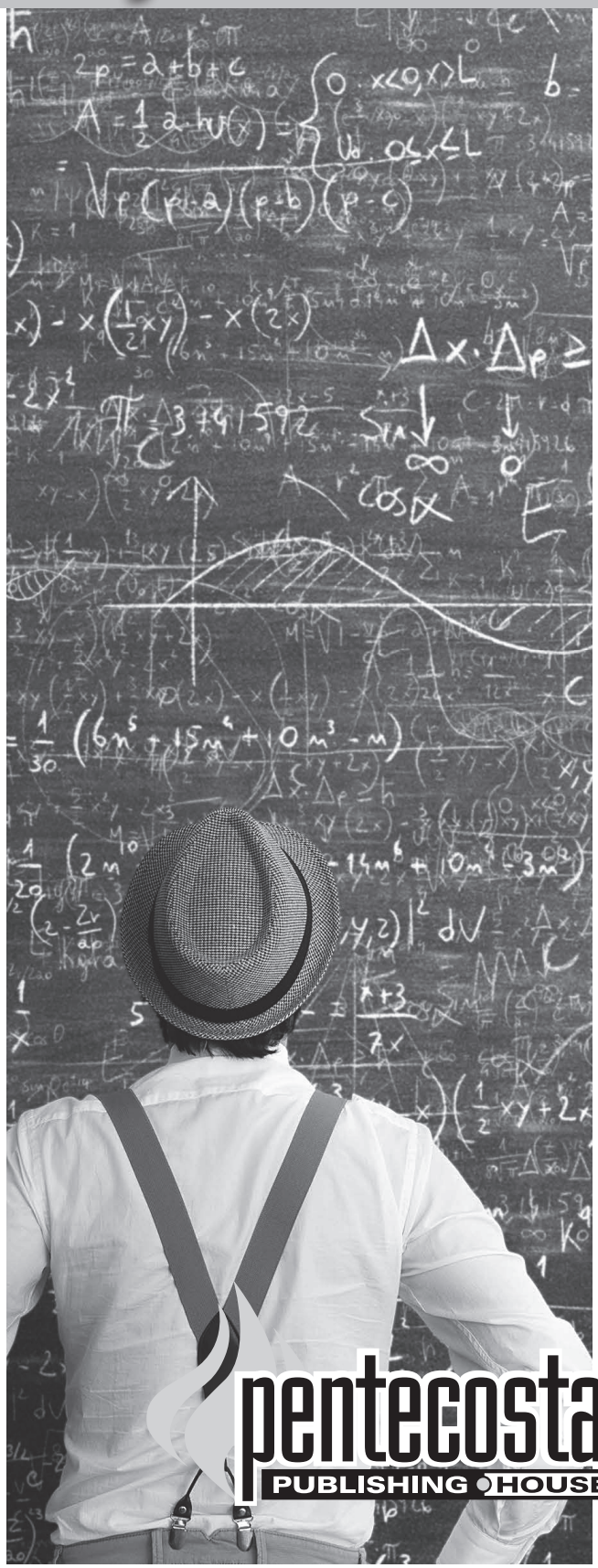
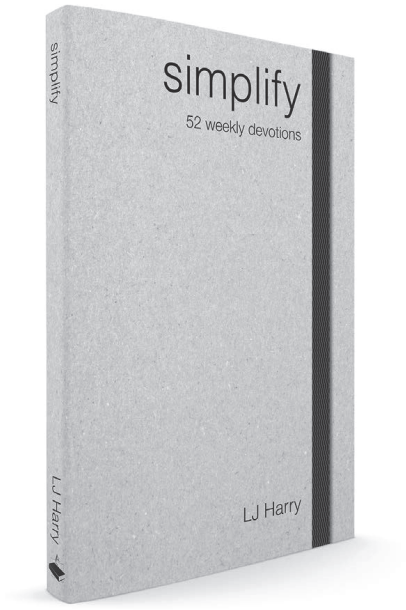


Maybe it's time to simplify.

I used to convince myself that doing my Father's business was as important as spending time with my Father, but He is helping me realize that's not true.

- LJ Harry from *Simplify*



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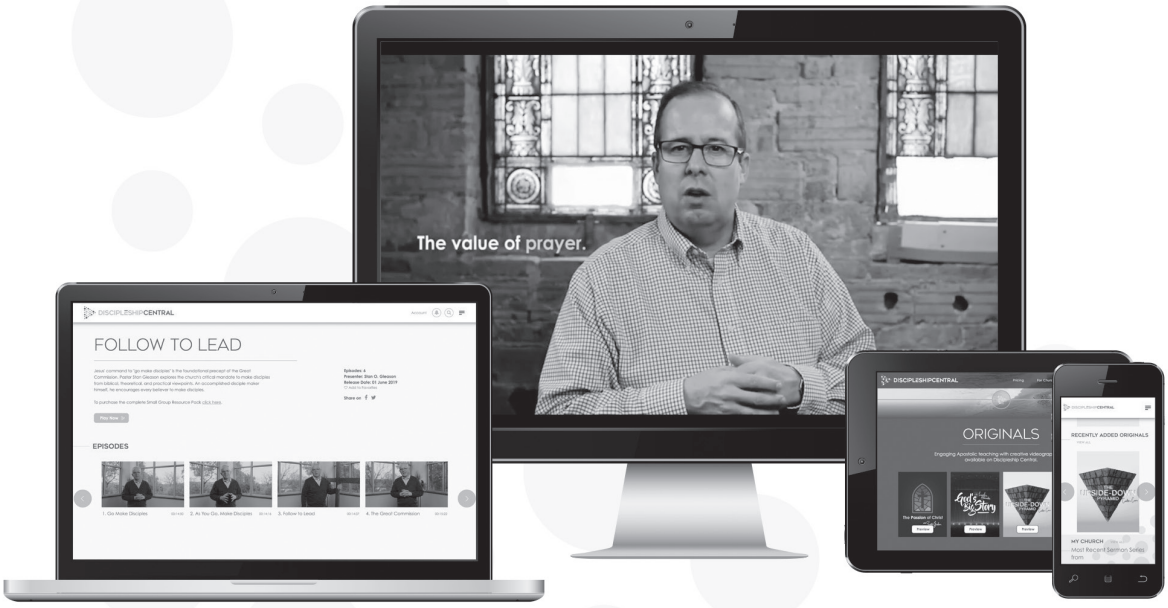

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