

The background of the entire image is a photograph of a person's silhouette standing on a beach, facing the ocean with their arms outstretched towards a bright, cloudy sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The clouds are scattered and catch the light, adding texture to the sky. The person's silhouette is dark and centered in the lower half of the frame.

Transforming Love

Living Out
GOD'S Ultimate Hope



Transforming Love - Life's Purpose Transformed

Key Themes: When you woke up this morning, God had a hope for you and your life. This hope is based upon your identity as His beloved. Your identity, as well as God's hope, is revealed through Scripture in the Story of the Glory. Our identity is founded in Christ as recipients of His gracious love. God's hope is that we might first receive His love and then share His love with those around us.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1:27

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves the Lord through Rejoicing regularly in their identity as "His Beloved" (L4)
- Loves the Word through frequently being led by the Spirit into deeper love for the One who wrote the Word (W1)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Psalm 103:2 "Forget none of His benefits"

Romans 12:15a "Rejoice with those who rejoice."

Worship leader leads congregation in the following:

As we prepare for the following praise song, allow God to remind you of a significant blessing in your life:

- maybe a recent answer to prayer
- maybe a financial or career blessing
- maybe He has brought unexplainable peace to you in a difficult time
- maybe He has brought great benefit to you through relationships—a loving spouse, a supportive friend, the blessing of children or grandchildren

The psalmist reminds us to "not forget" these blessings and Paul encourages us to rejoice together.

We will pause for a moment of silent prayer, asking God to bring remembrances of His benefits...Then as the praise team sings for us, share with one or two others around you and rejoice together. Your rejoicing might sound like, "I'm excited for you." "I'm glad that happened." You might even want to give high fives or hugs to one another; express your celebration of his blessings with what seems appropriate for you and your partners.

Pause for silent prayer.

Share with one another: "God reminded me of..."

REFLECTION ON EXPERIENTIAL:

Imagine God looking down upon us as we rejoiced together. What did it do to His heart to see His people experiencing His book?

- We have blessed God by remembering His blessings.
- We have blessed God by actually living out the Bible.
- We have been reminded that we are the recipients of gracious love and care.



POSSIBLE DRAMA: ACT OUT “THE STORY OF THE GLORY”

- Moses in the wilderness
- Moses with the Ten Commandments
- Israel with the cloud and fire . . . tabernacle/temple
- The glory departs
- Shepherds and angels – the glory shone about them
- Glory is in Jesus – John 1:14 – perfect life, death, resurrection, ascension
- Upper room – Pentecost – Colossians 1:27

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

- Quote from the Wall Street Journal; January 9, 2002. “The far-reaching shift in values, stressing family, friends and community over career, status and money, will continue to play out in the coming year. September 11th, has caused remarkable number of people across the country to call a time-out and ask two questions: ‘What’s really important to me?’ And, ‘Why am I here?’” We’ll address these questions of identity and purpose in today’s sermon.
- Dan Brown’s, *The Da Vinci Code* has sold over 8,000,000 copies worldwide. This book created an enormous amount of controversy and “buzz” for a book that was inaccurate and heretical. The book raised the question as to the “real” identity of Jesus, the “real” identity of Mary Magdalene, and the “real” identity of the church. Identity is one of the key issues twisted in this book. We don’t need a book to keep us from discovering our true identity. There are many, many devices that keep us from seeing, believing and living out our true identity... the identity we find in Jesus. We will discover what God says about our identity in today’s sermon.

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

God’s love has a distinct hope in mind: To bring us to a loving relationship with Him and then to participate in His expression of love and life in the world. God loved us so that we might make known God’s love to those around us. Our identity is found in Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf. The Gospel’s Good News declares at Calvary: Our identity is “His beloved” and we have the privilege to express His glory! We are God’s “glory-bearers” here on the earth.

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- God’s loving initiative is evident in creation (Genesis 1:1-31), in the daily blessings we have received (Psalm 139:3) and in the Gospel’s good news that “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).
- God’s initiative to express His glorious presence in our world is seen all across the pages of the Bible. We see His presence in a burning bush, on the face of Moses, in the cloud by day, in the fire by night, in the Ark of the Covenant, in the temple and ultimately in the God-man, Jesus. “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory*” (John 1:14).
- God’s initiative to express His glory in our day becomes very personal as we reflect on the Apostle Paul’s declaration of a mystery, namely “*Christ in you, God’s hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). God desires, He is longing, and hoping to express Himself in you!

- Revealed in this mystery, is the divine miracle of grace: God's unmerited love demonstrated to Moses, the children of Israel and to each of us. What have any of us done to "merit" being the recipients of divine glory and love?
- Having become "bearers of God's glory," we sense His hope and calling to a life purpose of expressing Him to others. In the simplicity of His embracing the children in Mark 10, we see Christ demonstrating the glory of God. He holds the children and blesses them – without lecture or admonition, without correction or rebuke. He demonstrates for us an illustration of who He is and why He came.
- Reflecting on the wonder of such loving grace and kingdom purpose affirms to us our identity as the beloved of God. "He did it for me!"

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Scenes of Calvary from, the Jesus Film or The Passion.
- Jesus holding the children in love. He's hoping we will receive and then share His love. (This visual connects with children's curriculum and family night ideas.)

MUSIC TO INCLUDE:

- Chorus – "Above All"
- "Amazing Love"
- "In Christ Alone"
- "Who Am I?" by Casting Crowns

EXPERIENCING CHRIST:

Let the entire sermon lead the congregation toward this experience with Jesus. Lead them to meditate on the death of Christ and His love for us, which reinforces our identity as the "beloved of God."

Imagine Christ at Calvary. Recall the crucifixion scenes from the movie, The Passion. Describe the scenes of Calvary. Build up to the words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?" Why did He have to become sin – or more personally, who did He do this for? Why did Jesus go through all of this suffering? Or more to the point, for whom did Jesus go through all of the pain and agony of Calvary?

Lead congregation in quiet reflection and then encourage them to speak these words in unison: "He did it for me . . . He did it for me!"

Optional: Pray with one or two others. Pray a prayer of gratitude for this ultimate benefit from the Lord.

Transforming Love - The Secret of Spiritual Transformation

Key Themes: Loving relationships provide significance to our lives and it is God's love that makes these human relationships possible. God loves us by revealing Himself through His Son, through the Scriptures and through other saints. God's love in us prompts us to yield ourselves to Him and what He reveals. As we (in faith), believe that He loves us and is even now praying for us, our yielded-ness brings a deepened relationship with Him and supernatural blessing to our lives.

KEY SCRIPTURE

John 17:26

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves His Word through frequently being led by the Spirit into deeper love for the One who wrote the Word (W1)
- Loves His Word through A life-explained as one of "experiencing Scripture" (W7)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Romans 12:15a "Rejoice with those who rejoice."

Worship leader leads congregation in the following:

Talk with someone near you about one of your favorite Christmas presents. Tell one or two people around you about a special gift that you received as you were growing up. Then celebrate together. Rejoice with one another over the fun of receiving.

"I remember when I was about _____ years old, I received _____" (bicycle, puppy, doll house, etc.)

Celebrate together as you share about these fond Christmas memories. This kind of exercise is a good way to get to know people around you and deepen the relationships we have in the body of Christ.

Reflection on Experiential: As you complete your sharing, consider these thoughts and questions:

- How long did this gift last?
- Was it replaced by something else?
- Do you still have it today?
- Was it the actual gift that was most important or the relationships that surrounded the gift?

In today's message we'll explore the possibility that:

Life's significance is not found in what we have or what we accomplish, but more so, in loving relationships with God and one another. Now, consider one other remembrance.

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL #2:

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Philippians 3:4

Consider a time when someone in your life prayed for you. Perhaps it was a grandparent or other family member. Maybe it was during a time of crisis in your life. Or perhaps a friend or loved one prayed for you to come to know Christ personally.

Let's reflect on this statement:

"I remember when (who?) _____ prayed for me about _____
_____. I'm so grateful she/he did because _____
_____."

Now, let's share these remembrances with one another, as God stirs our hearts with gratitude.

Congregation enjoys a time of sharing.

Worship leader continues:

I would guess that for many of us, this second memory is sweeter than the first. The special memories we have of relationships are often more precious than gifts we've received or tangible things we've acquired.

Let's sing a song of thanksgiving, showing our gratitude for how the Lord has blessed us through the gift of these relationships:

POSSIBLE MUSIC TO INCLUDE:

- "There is None Like You."
- "Nobody Loves Me Like You" by Jars of Clay
- "God is Good All the Time"

POSSIBLE DRAMA:

Father returns home from a business trip. He's greeted by small children who want to know, "What did you bring me?" Candy? Toys?

A teen-ager is pre-occupied with a school project, but is excited to see Dad return home, especially for his help.

Dad: "Aren't you going to ask if I brought you anything?"

Teen: "No, I'm just glad you're here to help me finish this Science project."

(Then Dad and Mom lovingly embrace.)

Mom: "I just missed you, welcome home."

Life significance is not found in what we have or accomplish but in loving relationships.

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

- Successful business men and women who have numerous possessions and plenty of prestige, have often concluded at the end of their lives: "I've climbed the ladder of success only to find, my ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall!" We'll discover that the key to a significant, transformed life is the richness and intimacy of our relationships.
- Share a personal story of when God revealed Himself to you in an extraordinary way for the blessing and benefit of another. Share how His revelation was an expression of God's love for you. In today's sermon, we'll discover the true blessing of how God deeply desires to reveal himself to us every day. I wonder if we're listening to His voice?

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

The powerful secret of life's significance is revealed in Christ's closing prayer for His followers. Christ prayed that we might receive both the Father's "revealing" love (which longs to show us all things) and the Son's "yielding" love (which longs

to please the One who loves us - John 17:26). In order to be transformed into the new creation that God desires us to be, in order to be transformed into His Image "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18), we need to hear God and yield to what He reveals to us. Thus, we can experience ultimate fulfillment when we experience the Father's revealing love and then humbly yield to Him. Our life will not have meaning because of things we acquire, accomplish or achieve; significance is only through intimate, loving relationship with God and those He loves. Jesus is on this journey of significance with us as our Intercessor. He is still praying for our intimacy with God and challenging us to yield.

SERMON: KEY POINTS:

- As Christ prepared to depart, He didn't leave His disciples with possessions, but with prayer. (John 17:1-3)
- Christ's final prayer request for His followers was that they might experience the significance of being loved by His Father as He had been loved. Jesus wanted us to experience the intimacy and unity that He enjoyed in relationship with the Father. That intimacy is only possible when we love the Father the way Jesus did, yielding to whatever the Father reveals. (John 17:26)
- How did the Father love the Son? By revealing or disclosing all things to Him. Jesus never commands, sends or reveals anything to the Father. Rather, Jesus loves the Father by yielding to Him. (John 5:20)
- The Father answered Christ's prayer: We have received His revealing love within us. God often loves us with provision, care and blessings, but most importantly He longs to relate to us, to reveal His life and love.
- Life's significance is found in loving relationship with God and others around us as He reveals Himself. There are three ways that God reveals Himself to us. They can be shown with the biblical image of "light."
 1. God reveals Himself to us through His Son. Jesus said of Himself, "*I am the light of the world*" (John 8: 12). The Son reveals the glory of God. When we focus on the Son of God, the Father will reveal Himself to us
 2. God reveals Himself to us through the Scriptures. The psalmist says, "*Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path*" (Psalm 119:105). God uses Scripture to illumine our hearts and share in His love.
 3. God reveals Himself through fellowship with the saints. Jesus said, "*You are the light of the world*" (Matthew 5:14). Christ's bride, the church, is a vehicle by which God reveals his glory to us ... through interaction with the community, God speaks and shares Himself with us.

We will revisit these three sources of God's revealing love during the remainder of this series.

- Exercising faith to yield to His love is the risk required. We must say "Yes, Lord," even before He has fully revealed His hopes and plans.
 - *It's this yielding of the Son that characterized His love for the Father. John 14:31.
 - *It's this yielding by faith that drew us to Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9
 - *It's this yielding by faith that we hear in Mary's declaration, "*Be it done unto me according to Thy Word.*" Luke 1:38

*It's this yielding by faith that was the heart cry of young Samuel, "*Speak Lord, Thy servant listens.*" 1 Samuel 3:10

EXPERIENCING CHRIST:

Let the entire sermon lead the congregation toward this experience with Jesus. Lead them to meditate on the image of a Christ who earnestly prays for them.

As you come today with:

- life decisions to be made
- life struggles to negotiate
- burdens to share

You may find yourself asking the question, "How will I ever be able to yield to the Lord in this way? How will I ever have this kind of intimacy with God?"

What kind of response would you anticipate from Christ? In your heart of hearts, how would you see His face as He hears your questions?

- Will He even notice?
- If He notices, will He care?

Could Scripture give another image?

The Book of Hebrews says:

***"He ever lives to make intercession."* Hebrews 7:25**

Imagine Christ laboring in prayer for you. He is interceding for His bride. Imagine Jesus forming your name on His lips as He prays to the Father. Picture yourself there with Him ... you approach Him as He prays. You hear Him praying for your needs and struggles in life. You hear Him asking the Father for victory for you. You hear Him groan as He pleads with the Father for you. Christ is praying for you and the burdens of your heart, and the decisions in your life. His love is revealed to us in Scripture as a praying Savior. Allow the Holy Spirit to impress truth of this image onto your heart:

Father, as one who has received My Spirit, (your name) has Your revealing love within. You are speaking. My Father, but sometimes (your name) has chosen not to hear you. I long for (your name) to hear You, Lord, so that he/she might know Your love and experience a life of significance with You. Please open this heart and mind, and give (your name) the desire to yield to whatever You say."

What does it do to your heart to know that Jesus, our Savior and Lord, loves you so much that He always prays for your needs ... that He always prays that you might hear Him and yield to that revelation? Take a moment to tell the Lord your feelings ...

Pastor or leader allows time for the congregation to share their feelings with one another.



CLOSING COMMENTS OF THE EXPERIENTIAL:

Christ prays for you and He invites you to join Him, but His invitation invites you to yield. He invites you to yield, even before He reveals divine wisdom concerning your decisions, or insight into your burdens. Will your prayer be “not my will, but Thy will be done?” Would you risk yielding to Him and His love for you? If so, you’ll be on your way toward the significance of loving intimacy with Him.

In closing, consider the testimony of yieldedness in this song entitled, ***“I Kneel Down”*** by Graham Kendrick. As you prayerfully reflect on its words and images, you may find yourself drawn to yield, drawn to kneel and pray.

POSSIBLE MUSIC TO INCLUDE:

- “There is None Like You.”
- “Nobody Loves Me Like You” by Jars of Clay
- “God is Good All the Time”

Transforming Love - Transformed Priorities

Key Themes: God has designed us for intimacy with Him (Genesis 1:26). In part, God loves us so that we might share close relationship or communion with Him. The Creator of the Universe desires closeness between you and He (James 2:23) and therefore reveals Himself to the upright in heart. God reveals Himself through His Word, His Son and His people. Intimacy with Him is formed in us by consistently *hearing* and *listening* to the voice of God in these three sources of revelation. The longing to be nourished by the love of God challenges us to put away all hindrances, so that His joy might be made full in us.

KEY SCRIPTURE

John 12:35,
John 4:34,
Proverbs 3:32

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves the Lord through listening to and hearing God for direction and discernment (L2)
- Loves the Lord by yielding to the Spirit's fullness as life in the Spirit brings supernatural intimacy with the Lord, manifestation of divine gifts and witness of the fruit of the Spirit (L9)
- Loves the Lord through experiencing God as He really is through deepened intimacy with Him (L3)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider how we may encourage one another toward love and good deeds."

Pastor or leader asks this question of the congregation:

- **Who** has the Lord involved in your life to help you better know His love?

Ask the congregation to reflect on how they might finish this prompt. They will be ready to share in a moment.

I remember a person who helped me see and know God's love. This person was my _____ (grandmother, friend).

Share something similar to David Ferguson's illustration in the story of his grandfather. Dr. David Ferguson shares often about his days of teenage rebellion. While there were many speeding tickets and conflicts with the law, David's grandfather showed up with a plan to love David and yet, still obey the law. And David's conclusion was.... *"If there is a God, He'll be a lot like my granddad."*

Secondly, the pastor asks the congregation to take a few moments to reflect on how this person loved you with Christ's love:

- **How** did this person love you the way Christ loves you? Reflect specifically on how they demonstrated or communicated Jesus' love. It may have been their prayers, their acceptance in spite of your failures or their encouragement and support.

After you reflect on **who** it was and **how** God loved you through this person, we're going to rejoice together as we share these memories with one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 speaks of **encouraging one another** as we assemble together. Today's experience will allow us to not only rejoice in how we've been loved, but also encourage us. This exercise will help us see how we too, can be an expression of His love.

"I remember how I experienced God's love through _____ (grandmother, friend) when he/she _____."

(He accepted me when I..., Comforted me when..., Unconditionally loved me when...)

Give the congregation time to share these reflections with one or two others around them.

REFLECTION ON EXPERIENTIAL:

If I could hear each of the stories you shared and your experiences of love, I know that we would hear of God's love revealed. He revealed Himself to each of you through the love of another person. It was *His* love, just delivered through another part of the body of Christ.

POSSIBLE DRAMA:

Stage is darkened.

Voices asking: "Where's the light? Who turned out all the lights?"

Tight spotlight is turned on to two/three people standing together; everything else around them is dark.

Voices: "Well, that helps – but where's the light switch? Where did that spotlight come from?"

First voice: "I'm going to find the switch." He/she steps into the darkness and then turns back into the "circle" of light.

Second voice: "I thought you were going to turn on the light switch?"

First voice: "It's too dark!"

Second voice: "So, what are we going to do – just stand here?"

Circle of light begins to move across the stage, leaving actors in the dark

First voice: "What's happening?"

Second voice: "The light is moving! We'd better move!"

Light continues to move, actors moving with it.

First voice: "We'd better keep walking in the light!"

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

Have you ever known a loved one or friend, who at one time was excited about the Lord? They lived for Jesus for a time in their life and then grew cold and indifferent. They seemed to be overcome by the darkness of sin or despair? In some way they "lost their first love?" How did this happen? Our drama may give us some answers to these questions: We must walk in the light of God's love lest the darkness overtake us (John 12:35).

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

Jesus saw life differently because of His love for the Father. He prioritized times of hearing and relating to the Father. We develop intimacy with God as we begin to hear Him and His revelation. He reveals Himself to us (gives light) through scripture (Psalm 119:105), through the Son (John 8:12) and through the saints (Matthew 5:14) that we might be nourished in loving intimacy. In thy light O Lord, we have light (Psalm 36:9). Only in the light He provides, do we experience intimacy and love. (These three sources of light will be the focus of our next three sermons.) As we walk in His light, the darkness of sin and self does not overtake us (John 12:35).

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- Just as the Father revealed Himself and His love to the Son (John 17:26, John 5:12 from last week's message), so He desires to do with us. Proverbs 3:32 tells us that God is intimate/Hebrew: sod (discloses Himself) with the upright. God is revealing Himself to us, but are we listening?
- Jesus loved His father as He gave priority to hearing from Him. I can do nothing on my own initiative (John 5:30). It was Christ's custom to turn aside from other priorities to hear from His Father, even when the disciples didn't understand (Mark 1:30). Jesus saw life differently because of His love for God. Christ prioritized time to hear from the Father, because of His love for the Father.
- Christ's followers have received in the person of the Holy Spirit, One who is longing for this same loving intimacy. As surely as Christ's nourishment was not of this world (John 4:31-21), so also our journey in love is to be nourished by hearing from Him. Learning to develop a spiritual hunger which leads to intimacy with God will take a change of our priorities.
- We must prioritize hearing from Him in Bible study: Since God reveals Himself through the light of His Word, Bible study must become more than just a pursuit of knowledge. We will want His word to become "living and active" in our lives (Hebrews 4:12). We will want the Word to become food that nourishes and provides vitality and intimacy between the Father and us. After all, knowledge makes us arrogant, but intimacy with the One who is truth prompts edifying love (1 Corinthians 8:1).
- We must prioritize hearing from Him in worship: We will discover that our thanksgiving and songs, liturgy and praise are for a purpose – to enter into His presence. Worship must become more than music, but a lifestyle of hearing from the Father and being transformed by the experience of His love. As we hear from Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), we will leave less alone because we have been intimate with Him.
- We must prioritize hearing from Him in fellowship: Our small groups will no longer become times to impress others, but opportunities to be impacted by His love. As the Spirit of God ministers in us and through us, we will become sensitized with the eyes of Christ, so that we can "sharpen" one another (Proverbs 27:17) and rejoice and mourn together (Romans 12:15).
- Cleansing precedes clarity. Faithful followers have such a deep longing to walk intimately with Him, that they "put away" anything that hinders their relationship—sin, unhealed emotions, childish things, self-initiative (Isaiah 6). Intimacy is grounded in a desire to please the Father, rather than a fear of the consequences of my sin. Our right living must be driven out of a desire to remove any hindrance that might get in the way of my intimacy with my Lord.
- A joy that is inexpressible and full of glory is an evidence of cleansing (1 Peter 1:8, Psalms 51:8, 12) and a testimony of a life lived intimately with Him (John 17:13).

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Visual image of Christ, praying with the Father
- Visual image of Christ's joy

POSSIBLE MUSIC TO INCLUDE:

- "Jesus, Lover of My Soul"
- "Nobody Loves Me Like You"

- “O Perfect Love” by Niel Bennets (Kingsway Music)
- “Kindness” by Louie Giglio, Jesse Reeves, and Chris Tomlin
- “You Are My King” by Billy Foote
- “I Belong to You” by Joel Engle and David Parker

EXPERIENCING CHRIST:

Let the entire sermon prepare the congregation for the following experience with Jesus.

The faithful disciple gives priority to a lifestyle of walking in these simple steps of hearing and yielding. We have received Jesus Christ as Lord, and must now continue to live in Him (Colossians 2:6), hearing His revelations through our interactions with God’s Word, God’s Son, and God’s people.

Let’s return to Christ’s upper room prayer, where He prays not only for the 11 remaining disciples, but also for “...those who will believe in me” (John 17:20). One of His many requests in this prayer is “... that they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (v.13).

This is His will for you and me. That we might move away from religious thinking to a joy-filled, intimate, relationship with God. He has revealed to us His desire—that we may be filled with His joy. It is time to respond, to yield.

We know that “...If we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

So let’s pray together with a partner, right here in the room. Let’s express our heart’s desire to yield to what God is revealing, and to do so joyfully, with an eagerness to please Him.

Lord, Jesus, I desire for Your joy to be made full in me. I want my nourishment to be obedience to all You reveal to me, motivated by the amazing privilege of bringing my joy to You, my Savior, Lord, and King. I want to encounter Jesus often, to experience Scripture as alive and active and to fellowship intimately with His saints. May Your Spirit in me motivate and empower me to please you with my life.

OPTIONAL:

The worship leader may want to conclude the service with the song, “I Could Sing of Your Love Forever” by Martin Smith, providing the congregation an opportunity to praise the Lord for His desire for intimacy with us.

Transforming Love - Transformed by Experiencing Scripture

Key Themes: God's heart is to reveal Himself and His love to all of humanity. This truth is seen from Genesis to Revelation. The Scriptures provide our boundaries for living and our security for "right believing," but there's more. The Bible is God's love letter, written in order to draw us in to a deepened love with Him and others. The Bible provides life to us, as it invites us into a closer relationship with the living God.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Ps. 119:105

Mt. 22:37-40

Rom. 8:33-34

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves the Lord through frequently being led by the Spirit into deeper love for the One who wrote the Word (W1)
- Loves the Word through yielding to the Scripture's protective cautions and transforming power to bring life change in me (W3)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Psalm 119:16 "I will delight in your statutes and I will not forget Your Word."

God loves us so much that He reveals Himself and His truths in Scripture. He hopes that we might hear the Word, read the Word, study the Word, memorize and meditate upon it.

To be nourished by the light and love of God's Word, it is important to take full advantage of every opportunity to encounter God in His Word. Let's encounter Him today so that we might experience some of the nourishing benefits and blessings of His Word.

God gave us His Word to help us experience life as we walk through our days. Indeed, after giving His statutes to His people, recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, God tells His people through Moses, *"See, I have set before you this day life and death, blessing and cursing, Choose life..."* (Deuteronomy 30:19). Likewise, Jesus said that His words are *spirit* and *life* (John 6:63).

Let's see how God's Word has become alive for each of you.

Try to recall a time when a specific Bible passage became a blessing or benefit to you. Can you remember a Bible verse that was especially meaningful to you? Perhaps it was the simplicity of John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."* This passage may have led you to your first faith moment with God. It may have been a promise like, Romans 8:1 and how you were reminded that there is no condemnation in this world, because you are in Christ Jesus. Perhaps it was an admonition like Ephesians 4:31-32, encouraging you and challenging you to forgive someone as God has forgiven you. You may not be able to recall the Scripture address, but can you remember being blessed as you heard, read, studied, memorized or meditated on God's Word?

The Psalmist says, *"I will delight in Your statutes and not forget Your Word"* (Psalm 119:16). In just a moment, we will stand together and "delight" in God's Word.

"I recall when _____

(what was happening in your life?)

and (what scripture?) was of great blessing to me because _____."

Worship leader shares vulnerably:

"I remember in my own life when _____ and _____ was of great blessing to me because _____"

Let's pause to pray, asking God to quietly remind you of a blessing from Scripture, then we'll stand and share with one or two others around us. Worship leader leads the congregation in a short prayer. *"Thank you, Lord for revealing yourself in Scripture. We now want to delight together in God's Word. Amen"*

Give the congregation several moments to share then make the following transition:

As you finish your sharing and we prepare to sing our next praise song, imagine the blessing you may have just brought to the Lord. You have delighted and rejoiced in the truth of Word! He has given the Scriptures because He loves us and wants to help *light the way*.

POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:

- "Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet"
- "As the Deer"

POSSIBLE DRAMA:

Scene is a Bible class with adults, youth, and possibly even older children.

Leader: "Let's share some of the favorite Bible verses that you've hidden away in your heart."

Three or four participants raise their hands and quote a short verse (include a doctrinal verse and behavioral verse).

Leader: "Thank you all. Terrific job! In today's time together we're going to look deeper into God's plan for Scripture. You all know that the Bible is given so we'll know what to believe and how to live, but there's more."

Class: "What do you mean?" (Class looks puzzled)

Leader: "Most of you would know that John 8:32 says that, 'We must know the truth, and...'" Leader lets class finish the verse, 'the truth will set us free.'"

Leader: "But what if I were to ask, free to what?"

Class is silent and confused. "What do you mean free to what?"

Leader: "Today, we're going to see how many times we may have learned the important truths of God's Word, read, studied and even memorized the Bible, but we have often forgotten the real purpose of God's Word...to lead us to love!"

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

The lights are turned out in the sanctuary. This is especially effective if the room can be made to be very dark. When the lights have gone off, the pastor engages the congregation. Ask them questions about how they feel in the pitch darkness, or what emotions the darkness brings out. Ask if anyone has ever been afraid of the

dark. Turn the conversation and question aloud, whether anything can be actually done in the dark? Can we work? Can we exercise? Eat? Read? Our lives would be incredibly hard if we had to live them out in the dark.

The pastor then turns on a flashlight from the platform or pulpit. Let the light of the flashlight illumine the room. The pastor quotes Psalm 119:105. Note that the light of God's Word is like the light of the flashlight. It pierces the darkness so each of us can live our lives without hurting ourselves!

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

Scripture has been given to lead us into a deepened love relationship with the One who wrote it and those He loves. It could be argued that Christ came to *re-hang* Scripture back onto the commands of loving God and others. We can certainly see how right doctrine without loving relationships is irrelevant and legalistic. We can also see how right living without loving relationships is irrelevant and judgmental (i.e. 1st Century Pharisees). For Christ to say the Scriptures (law and prophets) depend or hang upon the Great Commandment is to argue for a *relational purpose* of truth.

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- Scripture has been given to reveal to us the riches of God's love. The Bible was given to us by God, out of His great love, to provide direction for our lives. This is one way that God reveals His love.
- Scripture gives us the security of right beliefs or doctrine (This is the Rational Purpose of Truth). God's Word lights the way as we look for truth and what we are to believe. For example, we know that there are some who claim there are
- multiple ways to heaven and eternal life. But Scripture declares "salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). God's Word shows us and illumines what we are to believe.
- Scripture gives us the security of right living or shows us how to behave (This is the Behavioral Purpose of Truth). In a day when immorality and materialism, selfishness and corruption are the norm, Scripture challenges us that we can be "in this world, but we must not be of it" (John 17:11, 14). God's Word lights the way for relationships when it shows us that we are to do nothing from selfishness, forgive one another, accept one another and love one another as Christ has loved us. God's Word illumines how we are to behave.
- But Scripture has also been given to lead us to:

Experience the Relational Purpose of Truth

1. We experience the relational purpose of truth when God's Word leads us to a deepened love for others. Include a personal example of when you encountered God in Scripture and this prompted you to better love other people
2. We experience the relational purpose of truth when God's Word leads us to a deepened appreciation for God's love toward us. Include a personal example of when you encountered God in Scripture and this prompted you to better receive, understand and experience His love for you.

3. We experience the relational purpose of truth when God's Word leads us to a deepened love of God and expression of love for Him. Include a personal example of when you encountered Jesus in Scripture and this prompted you to hurt for Jesus, empathize, care for and love Him more.
- Christ came to **re-hang** Scripture back onto the commands of loving God and others. *"Upon these two commandments hangs all the Law and the Prophets"* (Matthew 22:40). Therefore, God hopes that as we come to experience more of His Word we will walk away having been transformed by our love from Him, for Him and for those He loves.

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Visual of Christ praying for us (To be used with the Romans 8 meditation)
- Possible image of a courtroom scene

POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:

- "O Perfect Love" by Niel Bennets
- "Kindness" by Louie Giglio, Jesse Reeves and Chris Tomlin
- "I Belong to You" by Joel Engle and David Parker

EXPERIENCING SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 8:33-34

Let the entire sermon lead toward this experience of God's Word. Prepare to lead the congregation to a more deepened love for the One who wrote the Word!

As we conclude, we will meditate upon, the relational purpose of God's Word. This represents perhaps the most significant source of nourishment that the Word offers the believer, yet so often the most neglected in our spiritual **diet**. Scripture is God-breathed, living, and active, and it is intended to be experienced in loving relationship with the One who wrote it!!

Let's embrace and meditate upon one passage of Scripture - Romans 8.1. Let's do more than read this verse. Many of us have studied this verse. Many of us have memorized this passage. But today, let's allow the portrait of Jesus painted in this passage to nourish our hearts. As we meditate upon this passage, allow God's truth to lead you to better love the One who wrote the Word.

In this Scripture, we see Jesus is our advocate. The text reads: *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1).

Jesus covers us as a shield from the arrows of the Accuser and those who would condemn us. Paul tells us: *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. When then can condemn? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Romans 8:33-35a). Christ has covered us and defends us as our advocate, even praying to the Father on our behalf.

Prayer of gratitude:

Jesus, I want to thank You for being on my side. I feel _____ as I reflect on Your heart of love. I thank you for protecting me and forgiving me. I ask for Your grace to love those around me as You have loved me.

Close your eyes, and picture in your mind's eye a courtroom. You have just entered through the ominous wooden doors and found your seat at the front of the room. The atmosphere is cold and frightening...your accusers sit opposite you in the prosecution seat, waiting to trap and condemn you.

Behind you, all the seats in the courtroom are filled with people who have criticized, judged, and accused you in the past. They have passed out hurtful and mean spirited evaluation and critique. There are those in the seats who have rejected you: you don't rise up to their lofty standards. There are those who have used and abused you, spoken out against you, been harsh and cruel.

But at that moment, the back doors of the courtroom swing open and Jesus enters the room. All the people in the courtroom smile with a hint of smugness, as they anticipate Jesus' ascension to the judge's bench. They almost seem to snicker, "He will put this sinner in his place!" Their anticipation for your downfall is palpable. They can almost taste the judgment about to come.

But rather than taking His place behind the judge's bench, Christ surprises all in the courtroom as He abruptly turns and stops, right by your side! Picture this scene in your mind and heart: Jesus is standing by you, as your eyes scan the hungry and wolfish faces of the accusers in the courtroom. You observe these that have come to condemn you. You lock eyes with those who have rejected you and criticized you. You see the faces of those who have abandoned you.

And then to your great surprise, you feel the arm of Jesus move around your shoulder. He gently leads you to join Him into a kneeling posture on the ground. Each eye in the courtroom traces Jesus' every move. They nervously watch Him. What is He doing?

As you kneel on the ground beside Jesus, you suddenly realize that the Lord has bowed His head and has begun praying in earnest. You listen more intently and realize that He is praying—for you! Your mind and heart are transfixed now, not by the wolfish faces of the crowd, but by the words and heart of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ—the Judge of the courtroom, who lived, died, and rose again on the third day, is on His knees beside you, His arm around you, praying to the Father for you!

Jesus is the only one who can condemn you, for He is the True Judge. But as you listen to Him, you realize that He is not bringing a charge against you. Instead the Judge has become your advocate. He has defended you from those who have come to condemn.

Keep this image in your heart: Christ kneeling beside you, head bowed, arm around your shoulder, praying for you. Suddenly, you hear Him pause. With His eyes full of love and compassion, Jesus looks up at you and smiles. He whispers, "*Where are your accusers?*" Quickly, you look around the courtroom. The critics have abandoned the courtroom and the accusers are gone! The Shepherd has protected His sheep. Those eyes that filled the room with condemnation and shame, the people who brought charges against you, have vanished. You scan the room and still can't believe it's true.

And Jesus rises, you stay on your knees. He has just defended your cause and protected you, but you don't feel worthy to stand. "*Lord, I am a sinful person! I don't deserve your love toward me!*" Jesus smiles and helps you to your feet. He warmly embraces you. You can feel the love in His arms. "*Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?*" He asks again. "*There is no one, Lord,*" you reply. Jesus proclaims with strength, joy and compassion in His voice, "*Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your sinful life!*"

The only One who could possibly judge and condemn you, the Righteous Holy One, does not condemn. Rather, He prays for you and defends you! He protects you and cares for you! He forgives you! He is your advocate!

The worship leader may want to lead the congregation in this prayer of gratitude:

Jesus, I want to thank You for being on my side. I feel _____ as I reflect on Your heart of love. I thank you for protecting me and forgiving me. I ask for Your grace to love those around me as You have loved me.

Transforming Love - Transformed by Experiencing Jesus

Key Themes: A loving friendship with Jesus is part of God's incredible gift. Abraham was "the friend of God" (James 2:23) and Jesus spoke of His disciples, not as servants, but as friends (John 15:15). Our intimacy with the Savior can be just as real. Rational beliefs about Jesus are essential, but they are not sufficient for an intimate relationship with the Savior. Only as we consider the person of Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to move our hearts to respond to Him, will we deepen our friendship with Christ.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Luke 17:11-19

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves the Word through encountering Jesus in the Word for deepened transformation in Christ-likeness (W6)
- Loves the Word through Yielding to the Scripture's protective cautions and transforming power to bring life change in me (W3)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Romans 12:15b "Mourn with those who mourn"

We have experienced Romans 12:15a during our recent times together. We have, "*rejoiced with those who rejoice*." Today, we are going to experience the second half of this verse. It says we are to "*mourn with those who mourn*." This passage reminds us that when someone is hurting they need someone to hurt along with them.

We've all experienced the irrelevance of inappropriate responses when we are hurting. You may have been disappointed about a job loss or a child's response at home. If your friend says, "You know, God will some how bring good out of all of this" — It leaves you feeling hollow and dismissed. If you've been struggling with financial pressures or health concerns and someone says flippantly, "I'll pray for you" — You're left feeling alone and disconnected.

What we need is someone to express compassion — to hurt with us.

To prepare for our message today, let's experience the blessing of comfort. "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*" Matthew 5:4.

The worship leader shares vulnerably about one of his/her own areas of pain so that the congregation sees and hears an appropriate model of vulnerable sharing. "I still remember the time when... I was saddened by my father's unexpected death, or when I was deeply troubled over my son's unhealthy choices, or when I was heartbroken over a close friend's divorce."

The worship leader then shares what he received or what he needed the people around him to say and do:

Worship leader shares what true ***mourning*** or ***comfort*** might sound like. I needed someone to share words with me like:

- "*I am so sorry that happened.*"
- "*It hurts my heart to know you're dealing with all of these things.*"
- "*I'm so sad that you're going through that.*"

Let's stand together before the Lord with heads bowed:

Ask the Lord to bring to your mind a time of disappointment or sadness, a time of loss or struggle – it maybe current or in the recent or distant past.

Reflect on how you might finish this sentence: *"I remember the difficult time when I _____"*

Worship leader says: In just a moment, we will share this remembrance with one or two others. And when we do, I want you to share the words that we've illustrated this morning. Share a measure of God's comfort with one another. Comfort is from our hearts, not our heads. Compassion is a few simple words: *"I am so sorry that happened."* *"I'm so sad that you're going through that."* Or *"It hurts my heart to know you're dealing with all of these things."*

Worship leader prays briefly: *"Father, bring to mind a time of loss, sadness discouragement or crisis and as we vulnerably share with one another—bless us with your comfort through one another."*

REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENTIAL:

Didn't you feel blessed that someone cared? Didn't you feel a little less alone in your sadness knowing that someone expressed care? But in today's message, what if the **ONE** hurting was Jesus? Could you and I care for Him?

POSSIBLE DRAMA(S):

- Act out some of the irrelevant and relevant responses to sadness with a family of actors
- Act out the Luke 17 passage of ten lepers. Close with the words, *"Were there not ten?"*

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

Imagine the shock the disciples must have experienced when Christ said to them, "I call you friends" (John 15:15). Could this be true of you and me? Imagine how it might have looked to see these words written on Abraham's tombstone: **Friend of God**. What does it take for this to be true of you and me? How can we be true friends with God?

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

Drawing from Scripture's relational purpose in the last sermon, the Luke 17:11-19 text is a great way to explore what it means to have a relational encounter with Jesus. This text challenges us not to merely give mental ascent to an important belief about Him, but a relational response to Him. Faithful disciples diligently pursue fresh encounters with Jesus with yielded hearts, confident that such encounters will change us into the image of Christ and we will be transformed!

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON ARE WEAVED THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE WITH CHRIST:

NOTE: *Rather than have the experientials only at the close of the sermon, reflective experientials are included throughout this message.*

God's love is ultimately and sacrificially revealed in Jesus and it's our loving encounters with Him that bring life change. We will be changed as we:

- Consider Jesus. Hebrews 3:1 tells us to fix our hearts on the person of Christ. To fix our hearts on the revealed Jesus is to keep our faith relating intimately

and lovingly to the One who invites us into friendship. It will mean focusing our spiritual eyes and heart on the person of Jesus, not just His position. It will mean moving beyond our rational beliefs about Jesus to consider Him and all that He might have felt as the God-man. As we pray, meditate, study and intently consider Jesus, the Holy Spirit within us can reveal Christ's heart, character, emotions, hopes, plans and burdens to us. We can come to truly know Him!

- Respond relationally to Jesus. In order to have close relationships, we must respond from our hearts. An intimate, loving relationship with Jesus is only possible when we put ourselves in His human shoes and then respond to Him from our heart. Just as we needed someone to respond from their heart as we told them about our pain, Jesus desires for us to fellowship with Him and know Him in this way (Philippians 3:10). We can respond relationally to Him!
- For example: Let's fix our hearts on Jesus as we read the text in Luke 17. This passage is not primarily about 10 lepers, or even one returning leper. This passage is about Jesus. Let's not miss Him! What could you imagine that Jesus might have been experiencing as He interacted with the one returning leper and asked, "Were not all ten cleansed?"

It seems clear that Jesus might have hoped to see all ten return to Him with thanksgiving. Now consider the next verse: What do you sense that He might be feeling in this moment? What emotions are behind the words, "Where are the other nine?" Ask Him to reveal His heart to you, so that you might encounter Him?

Pause and allow the congregation to give a few responses.

- Now, pause again. Allow the Spirit to move your heart in response to Jesus. What do you feel in your heart for Jesus? How is your heart moved as you consider His disappointment and sorrow? As you consider Jesus and how He was at times, "despised and rejected", "acquainted with sorrow and grief" (Isaiah 53:3) could your heart be touched with sadness for Him? Compassion for Him? Pause quietly to tell Him of your sadness and express your compassion for Him.
- Become transformed! It is His Spirit that moves our hearts with compassion for Jesus. When we are able to relationally respond to Jesus in this way, we have **fellowshipped** with His sufferings (Phil 3:8-12). We have been transformed a bit more into His image. And then finally, our compassionate care for Him can empower our compassionate care for others.
- The pastor will want to give a personal testimony about his/her own transformation as he/she has begun to fellowship with Jesus' sufferings and respond relationally to Jesus. Tell how that has begun to change you and how you see Jesus, His Word and His people.
- If this is an accurate testimony, you might share the following: When Christ is looking around for those who are giving Him praise, I never want Him to ask, "Where's _____?"
- Let's consider our response to Him again: "Jesus, as I consider how You have loved and blessed me in countless ways, my heart is moved with (joy, gratitude, thanks, praise)."
- Pause quietly and tell Him.

- According to Luke, the Samaritan leper “came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him...” (Luke 17:15,16). Notice that Jesus didn’t respond with embarrassment. Instead, He received the man’s praise. Isn’t it a mysterious wonder that the Creator can receive pleasure from the created? We do not have a Savior who is so distant that He does not notice the praise of His children, or so stoic that He cannot be moved by it. The Holy Son of God received expressions of thanks from this humble Samaritan leper, and referred to him as the one who returned to “...give glory ...” (v. 18 NASB). Just like the one leper, we have had the incredible privilege of blessing, pleasing and glorifying God today!

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- “I remember the time when...”
- Scripts for what comfort sounds like, “I am sorry that happened, etc”.
- Image of Christ standing, with someone bowed before Him.

POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:

- “If We are the Body” by Casting Crowns
- “Thank you for Hearing Me” by David Crowder
- “Jesus, Hope of Nations” by In Pursuit of God: New Wine 2003
- “I Belong to You” by Joel Engle and David Parker
- “Father, Let Me Dedicate” by In Pursuit of God: New Wine 2003
- “I Am a Friend of God”

Transforming Love - Transformed by Experiencing Fellowship

Key Themes: As we encounter the Lord in and through other believers, we are transformed. In fellowship with other believers, God's grace is freely given and received. In sharing Christ's life and love among the Church, we find connection and empowerment to share Christ with others. Fresh encounters with Jesus through His church, transform us more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

KEY SCRIPTURE

Eph. 1:18

Mt. 10:8

Mt. 5:14

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves people through discerning the relational needs of others with a heart to give of His love (P3)
- Loves people through humbly acknowledging to the Lord, ourselves, and others that it is Jesus in and through us who is loving others at their point of need (P10)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

Romans 5:11 "...We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

The worship leader leads the congregation in the following experiential:

This passage reminds us that before we were drawn into a personal relationship with God, we were separated from Him. Because of our sin we had no friendship, no relationship and no peace with God. But because of His grace we were saved from our eternal separation from God. We were reconciled, brought back and restored in our relationship with Him. Could you take a few moments and reflect on what your life would be like without God? Could you just imagine what your life, your family, your health, and your circumstances would look like if you had not been a recipient of His reconciling grace?

The worship leader gives a personal testimony of his/her own reasons to rejoice in God's reconciling grace. *I'm especially glad that God brought me to Him because...or I rejoice in God's grace because without Him, I would...*

Would you pause quietly before the Lord as He reminds you what life would have been without Him? Ask Him to remind you of His grace and how the Lord brought you back, made things right and restored you.

The worship leader invites the congregation to live out the testimony of Romans 5:11: To *"rejoice in God through whom we now have reconciliation."* The leader encourages the congregation to rejoice over God's grace by finishing the sentences:

"I'm especially glad that God brought me to Him because..."

"I rejoice in God's grace because without Him, I would..."

Allow the participants to share with one or two others in the worship service. Then remind them of how each of them has blessed and pleased God today. The Lord smiles when He sees His people living out His Book. And as we discovered last week, He's so blessed when we take the time to say thank you for His love.

The worship leader may also want to make the following transition. He/she might illustrate God's grace as a multi-faceted or multi-sided diamond. His grace or undeserved love to us has many dimensions and many facets. (The audience might be shown a visual representation of a large diamond. One facet of the diamond has the title, "God's loving grace." The other facets of the diamond have words such as: acceptance, comfort, encouragement or support.) 1 Peter 4:10 tells us that we have received God's multi-faceted grace and then we are challenged to share that grace with others.

POSSIBLE DRAMA:

This drama takes place in a small group setting.

Leader asks: Has anyone ever experienced a measure of God's grace? Have you ever received some of His undeserved love? This grace may have even been demonstrated through another person? For instance, has anyone ever accepted you unconditionally, even when you failed?

Teen responds: Yea, my grandmother. She hugs me and makes my favorite dessert, even when I know that she has heard about my difficulties at school.

Leader: Wonderful! That's certainly a dimension of God's grace – His acceptance through your grandmother.

Leader: Has anyone ever truly comforted you when you were sad or hurting?

Husband responds: When I got the report at the hospital about Diane's cancer, I went totally numb. But Aaron from our small group began to hurt with me. He told me how sorry he was and then he just sat with me while I cried.

Leader: I'm so glad that Aaron ministered to you in that way. That was certainly God's grace at work – His comfort being displayed through Aaron.

Leader: Have you ever been struggling with some decision or challenge in your life and a friend has come alongside to support you?

A woman responds: When my husband walked out on us when I was 8 months pregnant, it was hard for me to share my anxiety and hurt with anyone. My friend Amy organized meals for us and help connect me with a group of ladies who took me to doctor's appointments and helped out with the other kids. Amy's love was absolutely overwhelming.

Leader: What an incredible part of God's grace – His support demonstrated through Amy. I am so happy that she conveyed God's grace to you during that difficult time.

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

- Jean Vanier was born in Canada, and became a naval officer for both the Canadian and English navies. After this career, Vanier was moved to change directions in his life, and went to Paris, where he earned a doctorate in moral philosophy. During that time, the Lord impressed upon his heart to begin serving people with disabilities. He asked two men with Down's syndrome to come and live with him. This act of service has grown and culminated into the L'Arche movement, with well over one hundred communities worldwide, an organization that serves alongside and lives with people with disabilities. These communities have impacted literally the world with the love of God. And Vanier has discovered what real community looks like as a result of his extended work with people with disabilities. He writes:

To be in communion means to be with someone and to discover that we actually belong together. Communion means accepting people just as they are, with all their limits and inner pain, but also with their gifts and their beauty and their capacity to grow. To love someone is not first of all to do things for them, but to reveal to them their beauty and value. To be in communion with someone also means to walk with them. Those of you who have had the privilege of accompanying people in distress and inner pain know that it is not easy to walk with them, without having any answers to their problems or solutions for their pain. The essential at such moments is to walk with them, accepting them just as they are, to allow them to be themselves. It is important for them to know that they can be themselves, that even though there are wounds, and pain in them, they are loved. In a relationship of communion, you are you and I am me. I have my identity and you have yours. I must be myself and you must be yourself. We are called to grow together, each one becoming more fully himself or herself. Communion entails a deep listening to others."

Vanier goes on to say that it is impossible to resolve one's own inner pain without an encounter with God. He says, "We must be touched by the Father in order to experience, as the prodigal son did, that no matter how wounded we may be, we are loved. And not only are we loved, but we too are called to heal and to liberate"... "We are called to discover that God can bring peace, compassion and love through our wounds."

"Love, acceptance, forgiveness—those three things are absolutely essential to any ministry that will consistently bring people to maturity and wholeness. If the church is to be the force for God in the world that it should be, it must learn to love people, accept them and forgive them."

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

No one has seen God, but His love is revealed through other people (1 John 4:12)! God supplies all our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ (Philippians 4:19). This affirms that we have a loving, and a need-meeting God. This passage also affirms that God provides for both physical and relational needs. But we should be struck by the fact that many of God's glorious riches are found in His people (Ephesians 1:18). Therefore, a part of God's design is for us to first receive His acceptance, comfort and support through our relationship with Him and other people. Then we are called to meet these same needs in the lives of others. Through the loving connection of fellowship, we grow to see Jesus more clearly, love ourselves more like Jesus loves us and then we are able to express His love more effectively to others.

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- Our God, who is love, longs to meet our needs from His glorious riches. "My God shall supply all your needs" (Philippians 4:19). Sometimes God meets our needs directly as we walk with Him, pray to Him, read His Word and encounter His Son.
- God also longs to share some of His love through His people. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened . . . in order that you may know the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).
- Receiving and giving from God's "many-sided" grace connects God's people in loving fellowship (the goal of the body of Christ, especially our small group ministries). God demonstrates His love through us as we accept them with His

acceptance (Romans 15:7), comfort them with His comfort (2 Corinthians 1:2-4), support them with His support (Galatians 6:2) and encourage them with God's encouragement (Romans 15:4 and Hebrews 10:25).

- Connecting in true fellowship brings great blessings. We come to see Christ for who He really is, as we encounter Him in others! (1 John 4:12). We come to embrace our own identity as God's beloved, as we experience His love through others. We are challenged to love others around us through vulnerability, accountability and encouraging love. As we experience this kind of true fellowship we are able to partner together in the Great Commission because our loving connection attracts others to Jesus.

SERMON CONTINUES:

In today's message we will explore the mystery of connecting with one another in true fellowship. We will entertain the possibility that it was actually God, in each of these examples, who loved us through His people!

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Include an image of God's grace – a many-sided diamond.
- Include Christ's image – one that captures His glory for the closing experiential.
- Display this question for closing experiential, "Lord, what must I become for me to better reflect Your love?"

POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:

- "Holy Spirit Rain Down" by Russell Fragar (Hillsongs)
- "The Power of Your Love" by Geoff Bullock (Word Music)
- "If We are the Body" by Casting Crowns
- "We are the Body of Christ" by David Hampton and Scott Wesley Brown
- "We Break this Bread" by Chris Rolinson

EXPERIENCING CHRIST:

"Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" Luke 6:40.

Let the entire sermon lead the congregation toward this experience with Jesus.

Imagine Christ standing before you – the only true Teacher (Matthew 23:10). He is the One who is love (1 John 4:8). He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). He is the One who is humble and gentle (Matthew 11:29-30). He is the One who is often moved with compassion because of the needs of people (Luke 15:20). Jesus is the One who, by His Spirit, encourages us in Scripture (Romans 15:4); He bears our burdens and supports us in life's struggles (Galatians 6:2).

Now imagine that He invites you to become like Him, to express His life and love, to extend the light of His presence in a dark world. He invites you to experience His transforming love so that you might be a reflection of His love to those around you.

Pause quietly to consider this question: *"Lord, for me to better reflect your love, I sense it will be important for me to become more _____ (comforting, gentle, compassionate, encouraging, supportive, or attentive, etc.) to those in my life."*

And then, after you have sensed God's leading, let us yield to Him by praying with one or two others, simply asking God to change us in this way.

You might say just a sentence or two in your prayer: *"Change me Lord, to become more like you. By your Spirit, make me more encouraging, attentive, or compassionate that I might better reflect your love. Change me, Heavenly Father."*

Transforming Love - Transformed Character

Key Themes: Character is formed in us through walking with the Lord in consistent and frequent encounters with Christ, His Word and His people. As we experience His love through encounters with His Son, His Word and His people, we not only receive blessing but our lives are transformed. The simple expressions of humility, faith and gratitude become evidence of our love of Him.

KEY SCRIPTURE

I Cor. 15:45-49

James 4:6

Ps. 100:4

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves the Lord through practicing thanksgiving in all things (L1)
- Loves His Word through humbly and vulnerably sharing of the Spirit's transforming work through the Word (W4)
- Loves His Word through mplicit, unwavering trust that His Word will never fail (W10)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

2 Chronicles 20:12 "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."

The worship leader leads the congregation in the following worship experience:

God is always close at hand, but sometimes in the midst of trials and circumstances, busyness and relationships we forget to look up and consider who He is and how much He loves us.

Hidden in the Old Testament, is a great lesson from King Jehosaphat. The king was surrounded by his enemies and a somewhat unstable group of people. Jehosaphat was challenged with various circumstances and trials and yet as he assembles the Jewish people, he looks toward heaven and makes this declaration, "We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You" (II Chronicles 20:12).

Has there ever been a time when you, like King Jehosaphat, may have been surrounded by obstacles, not knowing what to do, where to go, but you turned your eyes toward Him? Maybe it was a time of needed provision, tragic loss, uncertain future, needed direction or utter helplessness. It may have been a time related to pain from the past or your fears about the future. You may have been experiencing a personal crisis or at a loss because of a family member or friend. As you recall that time, remember your need and utter dependency upon Him!

The worship leader will want to give his/her own vulnerable testimony about dependence on the Lord.

Complete whichever of these two sentences is most appropriate for you at this time:

I remember the time when _____
_____ and my dependency was only and completely on Him.

(For example, I had just been laid off and I couldn't get a job for six months. Through all kinds of creative ways, the Lord provided exactly what we needed.)

Or

Right now, I need to depend completely upon God concerning _____

(For example: Concerning my oldest child. She is very sick and the doctors can't seem to determine the cause of her illness.)

The worship leader invites the congregation to share their testimonies of dependence with one or two others in the room.

REFLECTION ON EXPERIENTIAL:

In today's time together, we will refocus our thoughts and hearts toward Him. We've expressed our humility and dependence upon God and His loving care. That is ultimately an expression of our love for Him, because when we demonstrate dependence upon God and focus our eyes on His provision, He gives us grace. After all, we know that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

POSSIBLE DRAMA: Lessons from the Garden

A drama with Adam, Eve, serpent, and narrator: Use light and serpent to communicate pre/post fall or have two sets.

Act 1: Pre-Fall

Adam and Eve are in stage surrounded by bright light.

Eve: I'm hungry, Adam, let's eat.

Adam: That must mean there's food around.

Eve: What do you mean, there must be food around?

Adam: Anytime you need anything around here, it means God has already provided it! When you get thirsty, you can expect that God has already thought of that. When you discover that you need water or air to breath, you can expect that God has already provided.

Eve: So, let's go look for that food. I'm starving!

Act 2: Post-Fall

Adam and Eve are on stage surrounded by darkness with a serpent.

Narrator: Eve took from the tree, and ate. She gave to her husband and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)

The narrator might then contrast Adam's faith-filled response with Eve's fallen tendency to take from the tree in order to have needs met.

- Expectant faith has been replaced with selfish taking.
- Instead of humbly dependency on God, Adam and Eve proudly tried to meet their own needs.
- Instead of gratefulness about all they had in the garden, Adam and Eve became discontent with what they didn't have which resulted in shameful hiding from God (Genesis 3:8).

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

- A story is told of Michelangelo unveiling a beautiful sculpture that depicted angelic glory. When asked how he could capture such splendor and divine mystery in his work, the artist responded simply, "From the block of common and flawed marble, I chip away everything that doesn't look like an angel." It is this very work that the Spirit does in us, as we encounter divine reality in God's Word, embrace life-changing intimacy with His Son and experience the wonder of love through the saints. Everything that does not look Christ is chipped away – such is the mystery of spiritual transformation.

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

Our walk in the light of God's love, revealed in the Savior, in the Scriptures and in the saints, not only keeps us from darkness but also perfects in us the likeness of Christ. His likeness in us is revealed by our humble dependency, expectant faith and grateful contentment. As we cooperate with the Spirit's work of humility, faith and gratitude we learn how to express our love for our Creator.

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- God's original design for our character was rejected by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). As descendants of Adam and Eve, we bore their likeness, a likeness that had become distorted, as a result of sin, from the Lord's image. But as we walk in God's light, we are transformed into the likeness of the second Adam, Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 15:45). In Christ, we discover what it means to become Christlike, embodying the character-traits of the second Adam. Paul tells us to "have the same attitude among yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). What was the attitude of Jesus? Well certainly Christ embodied the attitude and character-traits that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:1-3: humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance. And there certainly are more that are expressed in the Scriptures at large (Galatians 5:22-3; Colossians 1:8). But today we focus upon three crucial aspects of Christ's character that were evident in Him, and that can be developed in us: humility, faith, and gratitude.

- **Humility:**

When we look at God's initial design in Eden, we see that Adam and Eve were in humble dependence upon the Lord.

1. His needs were met in the Lord...food, water, air...and whenever he experienced need, God provided.
2. The Creator served Adam in the Garden, and in turn, Adam was to serve the Lord.

Jesus shows us what it means to be humble. He says to His disciples, *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself, but only what He sees the Father doing"* (John 5:19).

1. Jesus loves the Father by being dependent upon Him, by doing what the Father does.
2. John 13:14-15. How is humility developed within us?
3. It starts with dependence...upon the Father.

4. But also it is developed through vulnerability...honesty and transparency regarding our heart and pain in our relationship with both God and others.
5. Finally, humility is developed in us through approachability

- **Faith:**

Faith builds the character of Christ within us (Hebrews 11.1).

Throughout both the Old Testament and the New, faithful followers of the Lord brought pleasure to their Creator by demonstrating faith in Him at all times... difficult times and good times.

Faith believes God and takes Him at His word. Faith trusts God with confidence... even to the end. Faith expects God to provide, has confidence in Him and unexplainable peace.

- **Gratitude:**

It is a character trait that the Scriptures continually admonish (Psalm 100.4).

Jesus, too, loves hearts of gratitude (Luke 17.15-19).

Jesus loves gratitude because it reveals a heart that knows that God provides, heals, and forgives.

We demonstrate gratitude when we remember the benefits of God (Psalm 103:2), when we enter His gates with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4) and when we receive and express His joy, in spite of what we endure (Hebrews 12:1-2).

- Godliness and character develops through encounters with Jesus, God's Word and the church. This walk in the light of God's Son, His Word and His saints not only keeps us from darkness (John 12:35), but also perfects in us the likeness of Christ.
- We each bear the consequences of Adam's fall into sin:
 1. Sometimes we may selfishly take---preoccupied with ourselves and our fear that our needs will never be met.
 2. Sometimes we may fall into self-righteous blaming---excusing our own responsibility or proudly deciding to meet our own needs.
 3. Sometimes we may be hindered by shameful hiding---questioning our own worth to God and expressing our discontentment with who He has declared us to be.

The pastor shares a testimony of his/her own struggles with one of these areas:

I know in my own life, I often struggle with (personal sharing)_____

- But since the greatest commandment is to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength – I want to love Him? How do we do that? Through our:
 - dependent, vulnerable, approachable *humility*
 - expectant, unshakeable *faith*
 - praise-filled, *gratitude*

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Old testament visual of King surrounded by the people
- Power Point of worship questions and sentence completions
- Power Point of King Jehosaphat's prayer
- Imagine of Jesus washing disciples' feet

POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:

- "Great Redeemer" by Niel Bennetts
- "All I Want to Do" by Eoghan Heaslip
- "Amazing Grace"
- "Great is Thy Faithfulness" by Thomas Chisholm and William Runyan
- "All Heaven Waits" by Graham Kendrick and Chris Rolinson

EXPERIENCING CHRIST:

Let the entire sermon lead the congregation toward this experience with Jesus.

As we close this time together, let's join Christ in His final hours with the disciples:

His **humility** led Him to bow before each one of the disciples (including Judas) and wash their feet.

His **faith** led Him to *"lay down His own life"* for these friends and from the cross entrust Himself to the Father, *"Into Thy hands I commit my spirit."*

His **gratitude** sustained His focus on the Father. He remembered, ***all He had been given***, where He had come from and where He was going (John 13:3). It was this grateful focus that brought forth this testimony, *"for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross."* Notice that Jesus did **not**: Focus on **Himself**. He did not focus on His **circumstances**. He did not focus on **what He did not have!**

As we consider what the Lord might want to change in us or transform in us, let's ask ourselves: Where is your **focus** this morning?

- Could it be upon self?
- Could it be upon circumstances?
- Could it be upon what I do not have?

As we close this time, let's pray together the same prayer of Jehosaphat.

"Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes and heart are upon You."

Let's redirect our focus:

- In humble dependency upon God, our Provider. Let's declare our need of Him.
- Let's express our expectant faith that since He feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the field, He knows and can supply all our needs.
- In grateful contentment, let's praise Him that He is the One who not only knows of our *need*, but since He knows, He deeply cares.
- *And because He cares, we will "Seek first the Kingdom of God". We'll love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, "and all other things will be added to us" Matthew 6:33.*

Transforming Love - Transformed Relationships

Key Themes: God's desire is that we embrace a Great Commandment identity of love and a Great Commission passion. This love and passion comes through the process of spiritual transformation. The result of spiritual transformation is transformed relationships.

KEY SCRIPTURE

John 13:33-35

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED OUTCOMES

A Spirit-empowered disciple:

- Loves people through "Startling people" with loving initiatives to "give first" (P2)
- Loves people through Humbly acknowledging to the Lord, ourselves, and others that it is Jesus in and through us who is loving others at their point of need (P10)
- Loves His mission through imparting the Gospel and one's very life in daily activities and relationships, vocation and community (M1)

WORSHIP EXPERIENTIAL:

1 Peter 1:22 "Now that you have obeyed the truth, love one another deeply from the heart."

The worship leader leads the congregation in the following:

The Apostle Peter speaks to our journey together during the past weeks. We have allowed His truth to cleanse us and change us. We have obeyed His truth and it has transformed us. And yet that transformation has been for a purpose ... that we might deeply love one another.

In a moment, we will stand and bow together for a time of listening to the Lord. We'll ask Him this two-part question:

"Lord, who do you want me to love deeply this morning?"

"How do you want me to express that love?"

After the Lord gives us an answer to that prayer, I'll invite you to move around this room and express God's great love to one another.

How might you express His love to one or two others around you?

- It might be through sharing words of appreciation: *"You've been a great friend over the last few weeks."* (You'll love this person by appreciating their actions or efforts.)
- It might be through words of encouragement: *"I know that being out of a job right now is very stressful for you and your family. I want you to know that I am praying for you. I care about you and I believe in you."* (You'll love this person by encouraging them in their struggles.)
- It might be through rejoicing with someone in their celebrations: *"I'm excited for your new home, new baby, new job, son's graduation, etc."* (You'll love this person by rejoicing with them.)
- It might be through your words of comfort as you mourn with someone: *"I'm so sorry about your mother's cancer, that you lost your job or that you've been disconnected from your daughter."* (You'll love this person as you mourn with them.)

Don't forget to share God's love with your family and friends that may be sitting closest to you. You might share your love with a hug and a simple, "I love you."

The worship leader shares a personal testimony of how the Lord has prompted him/her to express love today.

As your pastor, I have already been impressed to share words of _____ with _____ since he/she/they _____.

Now, let's stand quietly and listen for His Spirit to stir our hearts with love for one another.

Prayer: *"Jesus, would you settle our hearts and help us think of You and Your love? Would you remind us of others around us that we might love? Perhaps it is someone next to us or across the room. It may be a dear friend or a spouse. You might bring to our mind a special student, parent or child. Lord, would you empower us with words of appreciation or encouragement? Would you give us words of celebration and comfort for one another? As we love one another deeply from the heart, may your name be glorified and your heart be pleased."*

[Allow members to express love to one another in the room.]

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENTIAL:

In today's worship together, we will be learning about our divine calling...our calling to join Christ in expressing and sharing His love to others. Just as you have expressed love to one another this morning, Christ hopes that as you continue walking in His light and love, you will more effectively share that love with others around you.

POSSIBLE DRAMA:

The Great Commandment and the Great Commission are essentially God's way of giving us the "Cliff Notes" of the Bible. We might consider the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as God's way of summarizing the entire Bible into two very simple text messages: Love God and one another—Then tell everyone how we've been loved by Him.

POSSIBLE SERMON INTRODUCTION IDEAS:

The United Bible Society tells a story of a Sudanese woman named Tabitha Kenyi¹. And as a schoolgirl, she wanted to go to church. But as she was born in a traditional Sudanese family, she could not. Her brothers told her that going to church would prevent her from achieving the level she needed to achieve in order to pass her school exams. If she did not pass, she could not go to **senior school** and then her future would be in doubt. So she did not go.

Tabitha eventually passed her exams, and went to university. There, she did not read her Bible, pray, or attend church. While at the university she also worked at a sugar factory, and in that time a number of her friends came down ill and died. This led her to question her own mortality and eternal state of her soul. It was at this point, the miracle occurred.

She had a dream. In it, her sister took her to a party where Tabitha became unhappy and desired to return home. For some reason, in the dream, Tabitha knew the party was not a good place to be, so she went home alone, without her sister. On her walk to the house, she says, some people came to attack her. She started running scared, fleeing her attackers. At this point in the dream, Jesus came to her. He said, *"I have been looking for you for a long time...I wanted to be with you, for you to be my partner."*

Still, in the dream, Tabitha walked away, until she came to a wide, deep river. Again, Jesus showed up, and took her to the other side of the river, safe.

When she awoke, the dream was real and lucid in her mind. She immediately knelt down and prayed. Then she opened her Bible to Mark 11:14, the parable of the fig tree. She did not understand the passage, but later a Christian student at the university opened God's Word and explained it to her. Christ entered Tabitha's heart and today she is a Christ-follower.

One of the verses that impacts Tabitha is John 15:16: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures to the end."* Wouldn't you like to know and understand what **appointment** God has for you?

SERMON SYNOPSIS:

As Christ prepares for his departure to the Father, He reveals the identity for us as His followers and how He has appointed us to go out into the world. Christ's last words to the disciples give focus to our own identity and purpose as believers (John 13:33-35).

KEY POINTS OF THE SERMON:

- "My little children" – This phrase introduces us to the tenderness of Christ and the gentle way He interacts with His followers (John 13:33). Christ's own betrayal and torment were only hours away and yet in this passage, we see that He is thinking of others. In fact, Jesus answers some essential questions that the disciples don't even know to ask! His love for us is like that too. He provides for us, often before we even know our needs.
- "A new commandment I give to you"—This phrase answers the question: Who is Jesus? He is God! In a day of religious confusion and the painful lie of universalism, Jesus still boldly declares that He is God. He is the Alpha and Omega, the One who died but is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:17-18). Following Christ means we are called to lovingly relate to the God-man, Jesus.
- "As I have loved you ..." —This part of the passage answers the question: **Who am I?** I am the beloved of God! My worth is not determined by what I know or what I have done. Our secure identity is found in the declaration of the young disciple, John. He identified himself as, **the disciple whom Jesus loved** (John 1:23). Apparently John came to embrace the wonder of this truth; he was confident of his identity as God's beloved.

Similarly, we are called to embrace the startling love of Christ. Jesus declares our worth as He offers forgiveness to us, just as He did with the soldiers who nailed Him to a cross. The Savior reassures us of our worth when He offers us acceptance even when we haven't changed, just like He did with the thief on the cross. Jesus offers us support just as surely as He provided for His own mother, and in so doing, lets us know that we are worth His provision. Finally, it is through the regular disciplines of meditation and prayerful intimacy with Jesus that we can more and more embrace the wonder that, **He did it for me!**

- "Love one another ... by this the world will know ..." - These words of Christ answer the question: Why am I here? – To love other people so that the world will be drawn to Jesus! Christ gives us our life direction. He lets us know that:

- We are here to share His life and love with those **nearest to us** (our Jerusalem).
- We are here to share His life and love with those of the **household of faith** (our Judea).
- We are here to share His life and love with those in our **circles of influence and local communities** (our Samaria).
- We are here to share His life and love as we **go and make disciples of all nations**.

POSSIBLE VISUALS:

- Image of Jesus with the text of Matthew 11:28
- Image of a yoke with the text of Matthew 11:28
- Power Point slide that reads: *"Lord Jesus, I particularly sense your call on my life to join you in loving ..."*

• **POSSIBLE SONGS TO INCLUDE:**

- "If We Are the Body" by Casting Crowns
- "What Kind of Jesus"
- "One Pure and Holy Passion" by Mark Altrogge
- "Your Love O Lord" by Brad Avery, David Carr, Mark Lee, Tai Anderson, and Johnny MacPowell
- "The Lord is Gracious and Compassionate" by Graham Ord
- "Rescue the Perishing" by Billy Foote and Fanny Jane Crosby
- "How Deep is the Father's Love for Us" by Stuart Townsend
- "You Love is Deep" by Jami Smith, Dan Collins and Susanna Bussey
- "The Power of Your Love" by Geoff Bullock

EXPERIENCING CHRIST: MATTHEW 11:28-29

Imagine Jesus standing before you right now, gazing intently at you. His eyes are full of compassion, and if you listen closely, you will hear him say, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"* (v.29).

Picture Christ standing before you. He might be wearing flowing robes and sandals. Perhaps He has a bearded face. Your image of Jesus might be of the resurrected Christ, with nail-pierced hands and feet. But as you look closer, you notice that He is standing in a yoke. One side of the yoke is around His neck, while the other is empty. He extends His invitation for you to join Him, to learn from Him. Hear again the words, *"Take my yoke upon you."* It is your invitation to join Him, to partner with the One who is love in extending His love to others.

Listen as you hear Christ speak to you:

- "I consistently love those around you, but I often do so alone—would you come join Me?"
- (To husbands) "I support and comfort your wife, but I often do it without you—would you come join Me?"
- (To wives) "I encourage and affirm your husband, but I often do it without you—would you come join Me?"

- (To parents) “I am attentive to your children’s hearts and sensitive to their inner most needs, but I am often caring for them alone —would you come join Me?”
- “I am taking initiative to lovingly sacrifice on behalf of those that you encounter in your daily life, but I often do so without you—would you come and join Me?”

Now meditate on your yielded response to the Spirit’s revelation of Jesus’ invitation.

In your own mind and heart, picture yourself rising to join Christ in the yoke. Imagine yourself standing alongside this One who is love.

Pray now with one or two others, telling Christ about how you will respond to His call.

Your prayer might include: *“Lord Jesus, as I meditate on the wonder that I have been called to join You in this divine purpose, and that I can learn from You how to better love those around me, my heart is filled with _____.”*

I particularly sense Your call to join You in loving these specific people:

Continue to change and conform me, that Your love and presence might be even more clearly expressed through me. I claim Your promise that, “Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1 Thessalonians 5:24 NASB).

¹ “Encounters with Jesus: Sudan,” *United Bible Society Special Report*, No. 21. (October, 1999): 15-16.

Temple Time - Lesson 1

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Joyfully knowing God loves me. (L4)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God is hoping to show us His love.



PRESCHOOL REMINDERS

Even though parents are the primary models, ministry leaders and preschool teachers are important contributors to the picture children develop of God. Positive faith experiences in the preschool classroom help a child develop a positive attitude about himself, the relationships in his world and his God. Additionally, by helping preschoolers develop a healthy self-concept at the same time we teach concepts of faith, increases the likelihood that they will have a trusting relationship with God (Leatherwood, 2012).

In this stage of highly imaginative play, faith certainly fits into a child's love of fantasy. While it may look as if it's *only* imagination and roleplay in the preschool classroom, children are developing long-lasting interpretations of both positive and negative symbols of faith. Preschoolers work to fit God into their life as they know it. Their concepts of God may be magical, but profound! (Fowler, 2012).

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- white paper
- cotton swabs
- vinegar
- iron

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

Be glad in the Lord... and shout for joy!

Psalm 32:11

Students will:

- ★ learn what it means to *hope* for something
- ★ understand how God is hoping to show us His love
- ★ experience an image of Christ who "can't wait to show us His love!"
- ★ experience the Bible verse: Psalm 32:11
- ★ rejoice in how they are loved by Jesus

Key Scripture Passage: Mark 10:13-16

PREPARATION

Prior to your meeting time, teachers will create a *secret message* for each child who may attend the session.



To create the secret message, use a sheet of white paper, dip a cotton swab into vinegar and write these words, "I can't wait to show you my love! — From, Jesus." Write these words in large print.

[You may also want to show pictures of Jesus welcoming the children. You can find excellent pictures of Jesus holding children on these websites: www.jesuspictures4you.com and www.oxygen-multimedia.com]

INTRODUCTION

[As students arrive, teachers will want to notice special character traits that are unique to each child. Be sure to be able to affirm one positive trait about each child before the end of the lesson. Is this child: kind, caring, bold, courageous, creative, generous, unselfish, flexible, etc?]

As children arrive, give them their secret message and invite them to come to the table to *decode* their secret message. Have an adult ready with an iron and ironing board or towel on the tabletop. The adult helps the students iron their secret message until they are able to see the message from Jesus.

Provide blank white paper, cotton swabs and vinegar so that students can write their own secret messages (or draw secret pictures) too!

OUTER COURT:

Gives an illustration that helps define the word, "HOPE": In a few weeks, our family is going to take a vacation to Disney World. I can't wait to see all of the Disney Princesses. I hope I get to see Cinderella and Snow White. I hope I get to ride a lot of rides and I hope I get to see our family and friends."

"Have you ever hoped to see someone? Have you wanted to see someone or something so badly, that you just can't wait to see them?"

Allow several students to answer.

In today's story, we will learn how Jesus hopes for something. He hopes that we will be His friend; He can't wait to show us how much He loves us. He is hoping to show us His love!

Tell the story of Jesus welcoming the children in your own words:

- ★ Jesus begins teaching inside a house in Perea.
- ★ Parents were bringing their children to see Jesus.
- ★ The disciples tried to stop the children from seeing Jesus; they thought He was too busy with "important" things.
- ★ Jesus was angry with the disciples for stopping the children because He couldn't wait to see them.
- ★ Jesus was HOPING to see the children. He wanted to talk with them, hold them and give them a blessing. He was HOPING to SHOW THEM HIS LOVE!

Next, encourage children to act out this same Bible story. Ask one of the adults (or one of the children) to play the role of Jesus. He/she stands on one side of the room. Ask one of the adults to play the role of the disciple(s) and stand in the middle of the room. All other students stand opposite of Jesus.



Jesus begins by motioning to the children, "Come on over kids, I can't wait to see you! (Make sure that "Jesus" is enthusiastic with His welcome and invitation. We want to convey how Christ "can't wait to love them!)

Tell the children to begin walking quickly towards Jesus. The adult(s) who are pretending to be the disciples, try to stop the children. The "disciples" will want to be gentle, but silly as they try to stop the children. "Oh, no you don't! Jesus is *toooooo busy!*" "Wait, you can't go over there. Jesus has more important things to do!"

Jesus then jokingly rebukes the disciples, "Don't stop the children from coming to me! They are very important to me. I can't wait to show them My love."

Play the game a few times, encouraging children to run to Jesus. Let them see Christ's enthusiasm and how He is hoping to show them His love.

After you have played the game several times, close the activity with the following: Ask the person who is pretending to be Jesus to take each child and sit them on his/her lap (If the student feels comfortable.) Jesus then gently gives each child a hug and says a special blessing to each child. Jesus will want to call each child by name and affirm a specific character trait for each child (A blessing includes words of affirmation or approval especially in regards to someone's future.)

A blessing might sound like, "Nathan, You are growing up to be such a kind young man. I can't wait to see what great things you do!" "Erin, you are so creative! I can tell that God is going to use your special talents!" [If you have more than 8-10 children, teachers may want to divide the children into smaller groups for this activity. Several teachers will then give each child a blessing.]

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Psalm 32:11

Bring the children back to a large group. Discuss these points:

Jesus really is HOPING to show us love. Although we can't see Him, He is up in heaven and He can't wait to show us His love. Just like our story, Jesus is hoping that we will come to Him and talk with Him in prayer. Just like our story, Jesus can't wait to show us that He loves us.

How does it make you feel when you remember that Jesus can't wait to show us He loves us? (happy, thankful, excited etc.)

How did it feel to hear the kind words from your teachers today?

Jesus thinks those very same things about you! He loves you and notices the special things about you.



Let's go into our Temple Time and tell Jesus how it makes us feel to know how He loves us. During your time in the Temple, let's take off our shoes and enter quietly. As you have your special time with Jesus, simply talk to Him. You might tell Him words like this:

Jesus, I'm so glad you love me! I'm so happy that you can't wait to show me your love!

Give time for each child to talk to Jesus and tell Him about the gladness in their heart.

CLOSING:

Let's end our time by doing a Bible verse that talks about those same feelings.

Psalm 32:11 "Be glad in the Lord . . . shout for joy!"

This Bible verse tells us to shout for joy when we feel glad about all the things that the Lord has done for us. Let's do that now.

Say the following rhyme several times until the children can say it confidently. Then shout it together as a "celebration cheer!" You might even want to give students some confetti to throw in the air.

"God can't wait to show His love!

Thank you, God from heaven above!"

OPTIONAL ITEMS:

★ **Sing this song to the tune of "Frere Jacques."** Have the children follow your motions. Sing the song several times until children know the words.

(First and Favorite Bible Lessons, 1996, Group Publishing)

Jesus Loves the Children

"Let the children come to me" (*beckon toward yourself*)

Jesus says, Jesus says. (*Point to your mouth*)

"I love little children." (*Hug yourself*)

"Let them come to me" (*beckon toward yourself*)

Jesus says, Jesus says. (*Point to your mouth*)

Snack ideas: Hershey's Hugs and Hershey's Kisses, Oreo Cookies

Temple Time - Lesson 2

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Praying and believing each day. (L8)

Key Concept for this Lesson: Jesus prays for us and would like for us to join Him in prayer.

PRESCHOOL REMINDERS

By investigating the meaning and function of prayer for children, Dr. Vivienne Mountain discovered that regardless of faith tradition or even in the absence of any connection to religion, children perceive prayer as a way to connect with a good God. They believe that prayer is a way to cope with difficult experiences and is used as at important times to clarify and articulate deep feelings (Mountain, 2007). Dr. Mountain's research underscores the importance of teaching children how to pray. Preschoolers are open to the opportunity of meaningful relationship through prayer, they simply need guidance, encouragement and intentional times set aside for prayer.

Teaching children to pray is a critical part of introducing them to Jesus and helping them develop their own personal relationship with God. If we want our children to truly know God, and not just know about Him, teaching children to pray is essential. After all, the closest of relationships requires consistent, intentional, meaningful conversation.

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- plain, light colored paper
- crayons or markers

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED:

"Morning, noon and night I will pray . . . and the Lord hears my voice." (NLT)

Psalm 55:17

Students will:

- ★ share one positive event and one painful event of their week.
- ★ experience the image of a Christ who prays for them.
- ★ experience the Bible verse, Psalm 55:17. Each child will say a prayer to the Lord.
- ★ demonstrate a bold and believing prayer as they pray with another friend

Key Scripture Passages: Luke 11:1; Luke 22:32; Heb. 7:25

PREPARATION

- ★ Create a private place in the room that represents the “special places where Jesus went alone to pray.”
- ★ Designate one adult to play the role of Jesus. Make a simple costume that helps the students visualize the image of Jesus. [Or you may want to place Jesus behind a screen or have a silhouette of Jesus?]

INTRODUCTION

As students arrive, ask students to draw a picture that represents the best thing that happened to them this week and a picture of one hard, or sad thing that has happened this week. As students draw their pictures, teachers will want to ask questions in order to clarify the feelings, events and details of the pictures. (Each child’s responses will be important for a following activity.) Teachers will also want to model their own examples of positive and painful events with corresponding pictures. Share your own pictures as a model of vulnerability, just making sure that your topics are age appropriate.

OUTER COURT:

Ask the students to assist you in acting out the story of Luke 11.

Tell the story with these events: [Teachers may want to think of motions that the kids can do as you tell this story—in order to keep them engaged.]



- ★ Jesus often went outside and found a place where He could talk to God. He took time to pray to God.
- ★ One time, Jesus went off by himself to pray and He prayed all night. Then the next morning Jesus invited several of his friends to join Him on the mountain. After He had finished praying, Jesus told these friends that He wanted them to be His disciples—His special followers.
- ★ One time when Jesus went alone to pray, He prayed for the disciples because He knew they were about to be in boat during a terrible storm.
- ★ Another time when Jesus went alone to pray, one of His disciples listened in on what Jesus was praying.
- ★ When the disciple heard Jesus praying to God, He asked Jesus to help him learn to pray. Jesus must have been saying some very important things in His prayer. I wonder what Jesus must have said?

Close the story with these comments:

Jesus knew that it was very important to talk with God and spend time in prayer. Have you ever wondered what Jesus was praying? What would Jesus be talking to God about?

Allow students to give a few responses.



The Bible gives us an idea of what Jesus talks to God about. In one Bible story, Jesus tells his disciple, Peter that He had been talking to God about Peter! Jesus was praying for Peter! In another Bible verse, we find out that Jesus is actually in heaven right now and He is still praying. In fact, the Bible says that the main thing that Jesus is doing right now, is praying for you and me!

Teachers will want to make sure that the adult, who is playing the role of Jesus, has a list of each child's positive and painful event. "Jesus" then begins praying for each child.

Teachers lead the children toward the place of prayer. "Let's tip toe towards the place where Jesus is praying and let's see if we can hear His words."

Jesus' words might sound like the following (Be sure to convey the feelings Christ must feel as He sees our positive and painful events. This is not the time that Jesus is preaching or telling the kids how they should live, but this is the time to convey how our lives make an impact on Christ's heart. We want to convey what Jesus feels for us—joy, sadness, hurt, excitement etc.):

"God, I am so glad that Jonathan got to go swimming this week. I know how much he enjoys swimming. Please help Jonathan and his brother know how to love one another better. It makes me sad to know that they had a fight." "God, thank you for giving Meagan a chance to see her grandma this week. I was excited when I saw how much fun they had together. Please bring comfort to Meagan's heart. It makes me sad that she misses her Dad."

Close this time with these questions:

How did you feel as you heard Jesus praying for you?

(happy, glad, loved etc.)

We were able to listen to Jesus praying, just like the disciple in our story. After the disciple heard Jesus praying, he wanted to pray too. I wonder if some of you would like to pray to God today too?

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse—Psalm 55:17

Let's go into the Temple and talk to God, just like Jesus was doing. When we go into the temple this time, we're going to pray for one another. Together with a partner, you might want to thank God for the good things that happened this week and ask God to help your friend with the hard things that happened.

When we say our prayers, we will be doing a Bible verse that is a great promise from God. Our Bible verse says, "Morning, noon and night I will pray . . . and the Lord hears my voice." (Psalm 55:17) When we pray during this time, we can be sure that God hears our voice. He has promised to do that.

Teachers invite students to take off their shoes as they go into the temple. Send groups of two or three into the temple and encourage student to pray for one another.

Encourage students to pray this prayer:

Thank you, God that my friend...

God, please help my friend to...

CLOSING:

As students finish their time in the temple, teachers close with a song or action rhyme.

I can talk to Jesus (*pretend to pray*)

Jesus is my friend (*hold hands with person next to you*)

I can talk to Jesus (*pretend to pray*)

His love for me won't end (*cross hands over chest*)

He hears me while at church (*peak finger tips like a roof*)

He hears me when I pray (*look up to God*)

He hears me when I talk with Him (*cup hands behind ear*)

He loves me more each day (*cross hands over chest*)

Teachers might also teach the Bible verse in sign language as a closing.

OPTIONAL ITEMS:



Do a bouncing prayer. Have kids think of two things they would like to say to God (it might be thanking Him for the positive event and asking for God's help with their painful event of the week.) Then gather kids in a circle. Stand in the middle and gently bounce the ball to a child. When the child catches the ball, have him or her say the prayer to God and then bounce the ball back to you. Bounce the ball to children randomly until everyone has prayed.

Snack ideas: Crushed vanilla wafers, grated coconut, powdered sugar and thawed orange juice concentrate. Help the children mix the ingredients together, roll the dough into small balls, and roll the balls into an additional bowl of powdered sugar.

Talk about how even though all of the ingredients are mixed together in our snack, we can still taste the "special-ness" of each one. Our prayers are like this. Even though we all talk to God at once, He still hears our prayers and the special concerns of each person in the room.



Temple Time - Lesson 3

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Listening to God's Word as it speaks to my heart. (W1)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God loves us so much that He wrote us a letter so that we can learn about His love.

PRESCHOOL REMINDERS

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- *string or yarn
- *paper bag
- *Bible
- *personal letter
- *treasure box
- *child's story book
- *small treats or prizes
- *sheet of music
- *instruction manual or rule book from a board game

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

"I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."
(NLT)

Psalms 119:162

Students will:

- understand that the Bible is written so that we can learn about God's love for us.
- enjoy an activity that shows how each part of the Bible reveals God's love – even the rules He gives to us!
- experience the Bible verse: Psalm 119:162 "I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."

Key Scripture Passages: Psalm 119:162

PREPARATION

Before children arrive, use string or yarn to make a path that leads children to a "treasure." You may want to only allow two or three children into the room at the same time. Connect the string to chairs, tables, and higher objects. Make the path difficult enough that children have to follow the string carefully in order to find the hidden treasure. Once a child has found the treasure, encourage them to sit down and enjoy his/her snack, being careful not to give away the location of the treasure.

Hide the treasure (A Bible and small pieces of candy or other treats.)

INTRODUCTION

Begin the lesson by inviting students to join you in a Bible treasure hunt! After all children have found the treasure and are enjoying their treats, explain that in today's lesson we are learning about how God loves us so much that He gave us the Bible to tell us about His love. Our Bible verse today says, "I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."

Today we will talk about how special the Bible is and how it is like a great treasure because it tells us about all the ways that God loves us.

OUTER COURT:

Teachers will need their Bible and a paper bag filled with a personal letter, a storybook, a sheet of music and an instruction manual or rule book for the next illustration.

Show the kids the Bible and say, "The Bible looks like an ordinary book but it's not. It is filled with many different kinds of books, but they all tell us about one great thing!

Have volunteers reach into the bag and pull out the items one at a time. As each item is pulled out, ask kids if they can identify the item. Use these explanations to show them how the Bible is like the item.

Personal letter: Explain that the Bible contains lots of different personal letters. There were several writers who wrote letters to different people, telling them about all the ways that God loves us. The writers cared so much about their friends, that they wanted their friends to know the good news about God's love. In fact, the whole Bible is like a letter from God to us – telling us about how much He loves us!

The storybook: Tell the kids that the Bible is full of exciting stories like David and Goliath and how Jesus healed the man who couldn't walk. But all of these stories are written so that we can see how God loved the people of the Bible and how He loves us the same way. God loved David so much that He helped him do a very hard thing – like beating a giant named Goliath. God loved the man who couldn't walk so much that He sent Jesus to make him well. God loves us just the same.

The sheet of music: Tell the kids that the Bible has many songs in it. Many of these songs are written to celebrate all of the ways that God shows His love. We can read about the ways that God loved other people and sing the same songs. We can celebrate God's love too!

Finally, the rule book/instruction manual: Tell the kids that the Bible gives us instructions on how to follow God. The Bible gives us rules that are important for us to follow, just like this rule/instruction book. One of the rules God gives us is "Do not steal." Even though God gave us this rule, He did so because He knows that stealing makes people sad. Have you ever had something stolen? God gave us this rule because He loves us and doesn't want us to feel sad. Even God's rules tell us that He loves us!



Play or sing the song, The B-I-B-L-E. When the music stops ask students to finish the following sentence. (You might even want to put a Bible inside a treasure chest, pass the treasure around the circle while the music is played. When the music stops, the person who is holding the treasure chest finishes the sentence).

Teachers will ask students to share what they like most about God's Word. What part of the Bible are you most thankful for?

Thank you God, for putting _____ in the Bible.

I think you're a great Author because...

Teachers will want to demonstrate several possible responses for the kids. Be sure to give your own vulnerable response as well. What are you (as the teacher) really thankful for? Such as, "Thank you God, for putting stories in the Bible. You're a great author because we can read about all the great things that Jesus did." Or "Thank you God, for putting music in the Bible. You're a great author because we can sing the songs that talk about your love." Remind the students that as you complete this exercise, you will be "doing" the Bible verse for the day. You will be rejoicing about God's Word.

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Psalm 119:162

Invite students to go into the temple and have a private conversation with God.

Encourage them to take the ideas that were just shared in the large group and share their own celebrations with Jesus.

Let's take off our shoes and enter into the temple. For this time in the temple, we want to take a Bible into the temple with us and then tell God what parts we are most grateful for about His Book. When you have your special time with God, be sure to tell Him what you are thankful for:

God, I'm especially glad you put _____ into the Bible.

You're a great Author because...

CLOSING:

Serve fruit roll ups as you close the lesson. Explain how the Bible was first written onto scrolls. Roll ups are similar to the scrolls of Jesus' day.



OPTIONAL ITEMS:

Make your own Bible: Provide an assortment of magazine pictures that show love (as well as things that represent “rules,” “music,” “stories” and “letters.”) Give students glue and construction paper folded in half with two holes punched $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in from the crease and 2 inches from the top and bottom. You’ll also need plenty of yarn.

Separate students into small groups of three or four. Give each group one folded sheet of construction paper. Have each child choose a picture to glue onto one page of the book. Tell students that they are making a book about love, so to make sure to choose a picture that makes them think of love. Tell children to save room for words to be written on the pages.

As children finish, gather their books together one on top of the other so that the holes line up. Put a strand of yarn through the holes and tie it; this will bind the books together to make one big book. Tell students that this is how the Bible was written. With God’s help, many people wrote books that were all put together to make one big book – the Bible.

Finally, ask students to help you decide what words to write onto the pages of the book. Explain that God helped the writers of the Bible know what to write and then the writers put down the words. Choose one picture at a time and ask children to tell how this picture reminds us of God’s love. Do several pictures to illustrate the process.

When finished, say: “We’ve made our own special book about God’s love. The Bible is God’s special book about love, and God gave it to us to enjoy.”

Temple Time - Lesson 4

Spirit Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Practicing thankfulness. (L1)

Key Concept: God shows His love to us and we can show our love to Him by giving thanks.



PRESCHOOL

Children aren't born feeling grateful. They don't come into the world knowing the importance of saying, "Thanks." Gratitude is a skill, habit and spiritual outcome that has to be modeled. It has to be taught. Parenting expert, Betsy Brown Braun explains it this way: "The seeds of gratitude have to be cultivated. Through saying, "Thank you" and writing thank you notes, children behave themselves into right thinking. to feel it, they must think it first."

We know that it's simply good manners to say, "Thank you," but feelings of gratitude can also help people lead happier lives. Grateful people are more resilient, have higher self-esteem, and are generally more fulfilled. Children who practice gratefulness have more positive attitudes toward school and their families (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). Both common sense and research confirm that cultivating gratitude in our children is a good idea. It's up to the adults in their lives to model gratitude, teach them to think, feel and express gratitude to God and to others. After all, we were created to give honor, glory and gratitude to God.

"A life contemplating the blessings of Christ becomes a life expressing the love of Christ." Ann Voskamp

SUPPLIES

*Classroom with
Temple Time Area
white bed sheet
markers*

BIBLE VERSE

EXPERIENCED

*"I will give
thanks for
your love."*

Psalms 138:2

PREPARATION

Before students arrive place a large white bed sheet on to the ground or push several tables together and spread the sheet on top of the tables. Draw a picture of Jesus in the very center of the sheet.

INTRODUCTION

As students arrive ask them to use markers to draw pictures of all the things that God has given them or done for them to show His love. Students are to draw pictures all around the edges of the bed sheet.



Encourage children and prompt them with ideas such as:

God has given you a family, a church, friends, and teachers. He's given you all these things—God shows His love through these people.

God gives us food to eat and a house to live in. These are some of the ways that He takes care of us and shows us His love.

God gives us plenty of air to breathe, sunshine for the daytime and the moon at night. These are some of the ways that God has provided and we don't even have to ask for them.

Be sure to model your own gratitude for God's provision; draw pictures of the things you are grateful for before the children arrive in the classroom.

As soon as you see that students have drawn several pictures, begin the Bible story.

OUTER COURT

Bringing a Bible, go to the Outer Court area for Temple Time, and have students take off their shoes.

To help keep kids engaged in this story, teachers might ask students to do a certain sign for the words, "Jesus," "sick," and "thank you." Sign language may be used or certain signs that teachers designate.

- ★ As Jesus walked toward Jerusalem one day, He met ten men who were very sick. They had sores and cuts all over their body; bandages covered their hands, face and feet.
- ★ The men were so sick that they were not allowed to get close to other people. They could never hug or touch another person because others might get sick too. These men couldn't even be at home with their families.
- ★ These ten men had heard that Jesus could heal people who were sick and they wanted to be healed too. They stood far away from Jesus and called out to Him, "Jesus, please help us!"
- ★ Jesus looked at the men and felt very sad for them. He knew they must have felt lonely and missed their families very much. Jesus felt compassion for these men; He knew their sickness had been very hard.
- ★ Jesus told the men to go to the temple and they would be healed.
- ★ Just as Jesus said, as the men traveled to the church, they were healed! Their cuts and sores were gone!
- ★ One of the men stopped, turned around went back to Jesus. The man came back to Jesus and fell at His feet. He thanked Jesus for healing him, praising God for what He had done.
- ★ Jesus was so glad to see the man and was very happy to hear the words, "Thank you." It made Jesus sad, though, to know that only one man remembered to say "thank you."

In today's story, only one man remembered to tell Jesus, "thank you." Jesus loved all ten men and showed His love by making them well. But only one man remembered to say, "thank you."



Have you ever done anything nice for someone and they forgot to say, "Thank you?" How did you feel?

Today, we don't want to make the same mistake that those nine other men did. We don't want to forget to give our thanks to Jesus. Why?

We don't want Jesus to feel sad because we love Him.

So, let's spend a few minutes remembering some of the ways that God has shown His love to us. You have drawn some pictures that help us remember God's love for us. Now, let's show God OUR LOVE! Let's say "Thank you" to Him because when we remember to say, "Thanks"— Jesus feels loved!

INNER COURT

Due to the attention span of preschoolers, the Listening and Prayer Center should be no longer than 3-4 minutes each. Be sensitive to the development of your preschoolers and transition sooner if they get wiggly! Temple Time should be a flexible and enjoyable ministry experience, not a rigid exercise.

Invite students to go quietly into the inner court of the Temple for their private conversation with God. Say, "Now that you have thought about the special ways that God has shown His love for you. Let's go into the Temple and talk to Him about our thanks."

Instruct the children to go into the Temple area and spend just a few minutes talking to God. Encourage them to think about the picture they drew and then tell God "Thank you."

As children finish their prayer times with God, celebrate the way they have loved the Lord. "Wow, I know God must feel so loved right now. He heard your thanks and that must make Him smile!" You have lived out Psalm 138:2!

CLOSING

Teachers will lead students in a "Thankful Parade." Have children march around the room, holding the sheet (rolled up length-wise) while praise music is played in the room. Let students stand on either side of the sheet and raise the sheet high in the air as the teacher leads them around the room. Periodically, stop the music and ask individual children, "What are you thankful for?" Reaffirm their answers by saying, "Yes, that's another way that God shows us His love!"

Close the lesson with the kids by asking them to hold the edges of the sheet and spread it out as large as possible. Say, "Let's end our time with one more expression of our love for Jesus. We can show Him our love by thanking Him for the ways that He has loved us. Let's lift this sheet high above our heads, lifting our thanks to God. When we do, let's say our Bible verse for today, "I will give thanks for your love!" Psalm 138:2.

Pretend the sheet is a parachute and lift the sheet high above the children's heads. You might ask one child at a time to run underneath the sheet as it is lifted. Encourage them to say their words of thanks: "Thank you Jesus for..."

After each child has had a turn, ask children to shout the Bible verse in unison. Lift the sheet high above your heads and say, "I will give thanks for Your love!"

Optional Ideas:

Snack ideas: Heart shaped Jello Jigglers.

Thankful Murals: Hang four separate sheets of butcher paper around the room. Draw a picture of a house, a school, a church and a swing set – to symbolize a playground. Provide only four colors of crayons for the students, but make sure that there is plenty of crayons for everyone.

Explain that each piece of paper represents a different area of life – family, school, church and friends. Give each child a crayon and ask them find the others with the same color. Have each group go to a different sheet of paper.

Explain that they each have one minute to draw something on their paper that they are thankful for in that area of life. One person might draw a picture of their Mom or their Dad onto the paper with the house. Another person might draw a picture of a cross because they are thankful for the chance to come to church and learn about Jesus. When kids understand, ring a bell to start the drawing. When a minute is up, ring the bell again and have each group race to the next sheet of paper.

When all kids have drawn on all four sheets, take a tour of all the drawings and talk about how much we have to be thankful for. Compliment kids on their great ideas.

Play a game: If You Love Jesus, Please Smile

Have children sit in a circle. Choose a volunteer to be “it.” It must go around the circle and say to each child, “If you love Jesus, please smile.” It can do anything to get a child to smile as long as he or she doesn’t touch the child. No tickling allowed!

The other players must resist smiling and say, “I really love Jesus, but I just can’t smile.” If a smile occurs, the smiling player becomes It.

Sing this song with the children to the tune of “Praise Him, Praise Him.”

Thank Him, thank Him,
All you happy children,
God is good, God is good.

(repeat)

Thank Him, thank Him,
All you happy children,
For your family, for your family.

(Repeat)

Create new verses as children share things they are thankful for.

Sing the following song to the tune of “This Old Man.” Have the children follow your motions. Sing the song several times until they know the words. (First and Favorite Bible Lessons for Preschoolers, Group Publishing, 1996).

Worship God (Raise hands in praise)
Love Him too. (Cross arms against chest)
For He’s the only God that’s true (Hold up one finger.)
He cares for us in many, many ways. (hug yourself)
So we sing this song of praise (Clap to the beat)

Temple Time - Lesson 5

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Learning how Jesus sees us and others so we can see the same. (P4)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God loves us and wants us to love others.

PRESCHOOL REMINDERS

Students will:

*learn the story of Zacchaeus and how Jesus loved him even though he did wrong things.

*students will experience the image of Jesus who loves them "even though . . ."

*students will think of ways that they might show this same kind of love to others, "even though they . . ."

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

*clothes and props for Zacchaeus

*step ladder or stool

*jellybeans

Key Scripture Passages: Luke 19:1-6

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, you will want to practice the Zacchaeus character with two of your volunteers. Make sure they have a clear understanding of how to create the character and practice the fun story telling.

INTRODUCTION

As children arrive invite them to play a game of Freeze Tag. The rules are as follows: Someone will be "It" for the game. When "It" tags a child, he or she must freeze in that same spot. Frozen children may not move around until a friend comes up and touches them, "unfreezing" them so that they can continue to play. Everyone must care for one another, (even though they may not know everyone or be the closest friends) or everyone will end up frozen.

After kids have played several times, say, "One of the reasons why I like this game is because in order to play the game and keep it fun, we have to care for one another – even though we may not know everyone in the room, or even though

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

"Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you." (NLT)

Romans 15:7

others may be different from us. If we wanted the game to still be fun, we had to help one another – even though . . .”

Explain that in today’s lesson we will learn how Jesus loved a man named Zacchaeus, even though Zacchaeus stole from others, cheated, lied and was very unkind to his neighbors. Even though Zacchaeus did these things, Jesus loved him.

OUTER COURT:

Teachers may want to create a special character to tell this story. The optical illusion of this character creates a terrifically short character. One person should kneel behind a table and pull a pair of large shorts up around his/her arms until the shorts reach the elbows. Person #1 puts his hands inside a pair of tennis shoes and places their arms on top of a table. Person #1 has now created the “legs” for Zacchaeus.

A second person pulls a large T-shirt over Person #1’s head and pulls the shirt down until it can be tucked inside the shorts. Person #2 then kneels or sits closely behind the first person so he/she cannot be seen. Person #2 puts his/her arms through the sleeves of the T-shirt and has now created the “arms” for Zacchaeus.

Practice retelling the Bible story as the character, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus may want to brush his hair before going to the market. Show the arm and leg movements as Zacchaeus walks to town, climbs the tree and waves to Jesus. Zacchaeus might shade his eyes as he looks for Jesus or stroke his beard as he tries to decide the amount of tax. Make it fun to watch as you tell the story of Zacchaeus.

*Zacchaeus walks down the road with his eyes looking only at the ground.

*The town’s people call him names and even throw rocks.

*Zacchaeus enters the market place as the big gate is opened.

*Zacchaeus talks with the people who are there to sell their goods.

*Zacchaeus looks in their carts and sometimes steals from the people.

*Zacchaeus makes a man or woman pay more money than the next, just because he wants more money from himself.

*Zacchaeus hears people calling out the name, “Jesus”. He tries to see this famous teacher who everyone has been talking about.

*Zacchaeus climbs the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus.

*The crowd begins to laugh at Zacchaeus and make fun of him when they notice that he is in the tree.

*Jesus walks over to Zacchaeus and calls to him with a kind voice. Jesus tells Zacchaeus that He would like to be his friend and to have a meal with him.

*After Zacchaeus has dinner with Jesus, he gives back all the money that he had ever stolen and even more!

*Jesus loved Zacchaeus even though he had done things that were wrong. Jesus loved Zacchaeus even though he had done things that were unkind. Jesus loves us even though we sometimes do things that are wrong and unkind too.





Teachers will want to bring a stepladder or some other ladder into the classroom for this activity. After the story, ask students to think of a time when they did something wrong or unkind to others. Ask children to think of that time and remember it. One by one, ask children to climb the ladder and tell about the time when they were unkind to other people or did something that they knew was wrong (As they climb the step ladder they are pretending to be like Zacchaeus—they know they've done things that were wrong, but want to see Jesus). Teachers will want to be the first ones to model this activity. You will want to climb the stepladder yourself and tell the children about a real event in your life when your own behavior was less than perfect (keeping the age of the children in mind). Then receive Jesus' words of acceptance for you!

After each child has finished telling his story, have one adult (who is pretending to be Jesus) welcome the child down from the ladder. Jesus might say, "Come on down, Jacob. I love you even though those things happened!" "Come on down, Leah. I love you even though you made some wrong choices!" (Make sure that Jesus gives a warm, accepting greeting to the children. We know that this was Christ's response, because Scripture tells us that Zacchaeus came down from the tree with gladness in his heart.)

Teachers will explain how Jesus loves us even though we sometimes do things that are wrong and unkind. He wants us to show that same kind of love to others. Even though people around us may do wrong things or say unkind words, because Jesus has shown us love, we can show love to others.

Our Bible verse for today is: Romans 15:7 "Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you." This means that because Jesus has loved us when we are wrong or unkind, we can show this same love for others."

What are some things we can do to show others that we love them even when they do things that are wrong or unkind?

Allow several children to respond. Then tell the following story. Ask students to pretend that they are in the story. Each time that you stop the story, ask kids to think of all the kind things that they could do. (You might ask children to do motions along with you, in order to keep them engaged in the story.)

One day, several of your friends were playing in the sandbox. You all worked together to build a castle. You piled up the sand and cut out the windows and doors. You shaped it into a beautiful castle.

Everyone was having a good time until Matthew took the shovel away from Kim. What loving thing could you do, even though Matthew did something that was unkind?

Next, you and your friends built a racetrack in the sand. You smoothed it out and made turns and hills and valleys in the sandbox. Then you pretended to drive cars around the racetrack. Lincoln was just about to win the race when Jennifer accidentally fell and smashed the racetrack. What loving thing could you do, even though Jennifer did something that disappointed others?

Finally, you all decided to dig a tunnel. You shoveled the sand until you made a great big mound in the middle of the sandbox. Then you dug through the pile of sand, making a great tunnel for all of the cars and trucks to go through. Everything was going great until Sarah got angry with Michael and smashed the tunnel to pieces. What loving thing could you do, even though Sarah did something that was wrong?

Allow children to make suggestions of how to accept one another even when wrong or unkind things are done. Teachers may need to model or make suggestions about what to say.

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Romans 15:7

Next, invite students to enter into the temple. During this temple time students will take off their shoes and go into the temple with one other friend.

Pair up the students and then prep them for their time in the temple.

Talk to your friend about what you need God to help you change. Do you need God to help you be more kind? more patient? more gentle with your words? more respectful? Tell your friend how you need God's help.

I need God to help me be more _____.

While you are in the temple, you will pray FOR your friend. You will ask God to help your friend with whatever they just shared. Say a prayer about your friend. Ask God to help them. This is one way that we can show acceptance to others. We can pray for them and show that we care. That might sound like this:

God, please help my friend be more gentle with his words. God please help my friend be more respectful to his mom or dad.

CLOSING:

After students have finished their temple time, give each child a handful of jellybeans. Ask them to create a picture with the jellybeans that reminds them of how Jesus loves us even though we do wrong things and how we can do the same for others. Close the time by asking children to think of one person who needs their acceptance. Ask children to finish the sentence, "I want God to help me show His love to my _____."

OPTIONAL ITEMS: Paint pictures of Jesus welcoming Zacchaeus down from the tree with vanilla pudding that has added food coloring.

You will need paper and small bowls of prepared vanilla pudding colored with food coloring. You will also need washcloths for cleaning up.

Temple Time - Lesson 6

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Sharing with the poor. (M5)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God is busy loving other people who don't know Jesus and wants us to join Him.

PRESCHOOL REMINDERS

Students will:

*understand that God often involves other people to help Him share His love. They will hear the story of Jesus and the paralytic.

*express love to other friends.

*make plans to express love to people outside of the classroom.

Key Scripture Passages: Luke 5:17 - 26

PREPARATION

You will need a paper sack filled with decorations such as streamers, balloons, party hats, noisemakers, banners and festive tablecloths.

As children arrive show them the sack's contents and give each child one decoration. Have kids contribute to decorating the entire room. As they finish decorating say, "Our party today is to celebrate God's love. In our class, we often talk about the many ways that God loves us. Today, we are going to have a party to celebrate His love. We will also get to practice loving one another today. Our Bible verse today says, "Let us continue to love one another because love comes from God." Let's learn about some friends who showed God's love to one special man."

SUPPLIES

*paper sack filled with party decorations

*supplies to create a "house" in the classroom

*graham crackers, marshmallows, chocolate chips and teddy grahams

*oven or microwave

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED:

"Let us continue to love one another because love comes from God."

1 John 4:7

INTRODUCTION

Teachers will want to create a “house” for the children to sit in while you tell this story. Arrange tables by turning them on their sides and sitting them next to each other so the tabletops and legs form a rectangle. Tape newsprint or newspapers over the top to form a roof.

Gather the children inside the house and tell this story. Involve the children by asking them to follow you as you tell the story with hand motions that go with specific words. Teachers designate signs or sign language to go with these words: “Jesus,” “help,” “friend.”

*One day, Jesus went to a town called Capernaum.

*The people were so excited that Jesus was coming to their town – they helped tell everyone the news.

*Lots of people packed themselves inside of a house to listen to Jesus teach.

*But there were four men who wanted to help their friend get inside the house too. Their friend was paralyzed – he couldn’t move his legs at all.

*The man had to lie on a mat and be carried everywhere he went.

*The four friends tried to carry the man inside the door of the house, but there were too many people—they couldn’t fit.

*The friends looked at the house and wondered how they were going to help the man get inside. Then they had a great idea. They decided to cut a hole in the roof and let their friend down through the hole.

*They all helped carry their friend up to the roof. Then they dug and chopped until there was a hole in the roof.

*Jesus looked at the paralyzed man. Then he looked up and saw the four friends. He was so happy that the four friends helped the man and believed that Jesus could help him.

*Jesus said to the man, “Get up, take your mat, and go home.”

*Immediately the man’s legs grew strong. He stood up and walked out the door.

End the story with these comments/questions: Do you think Jesus could have gone to the paralyzed man and helped him there? Certainly. Do you think that Jesus could have spoken the words and the man could have been healed? Yes, Jesus didn’t even have to be with the man – He is that powerful! But this story reminds us that a lot of times, God involves other people in showing His love. In this story, God involved the four friends to help the paralyzed man see and know of God’s love.



The same is true for us. God is always busy loving other people in this world. We may not be able to see Him but He shows His love for us when He protects us from harm. God shows His love when He provides jobs for mom and dad so that they can buy groceries and pay for your house. God is always busy loving you! God also likes to involve other people in showing His love. Just like the four friends in our story, God wants us to love one another, so that people will receive even more of His love.

OUTER COURT:

Set up chairs in a circle. Put one chair in the center of the circle. Place a party hat on that chair. Tell children that they will now get the chance to do the Bible verse, show love to one another.

Tell kids to sit in the circle of chairs. Sit in the middle and put on the party hat. Say that they will play a game where one person sits in the middle of the circle. Then we will all get the chance to say loving, kind words to this person. We will tell the person who sits in the middle some of the things we like about them.

Children might say sentences to one another like:

"I'm glad you're my friend."

"I like the way you always say kind words."

"I like you because you help me laugh."

"I'm glad that we get to play on the playground together."

"I think you're great!"

Let everyone have a chance to be in the center of the circle. Teachers can be in the center of the circle too! Affirm visitors for ways they have already contributed to the class.

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - 1 John 4:7

Next, prepare the students for temple time.

"Let's take off our shoes and enter the inner court of the temple. When you go into the temple, I want you to ask God to tell you the name of one person who doesn't know Jesus yet. Here's what you will ask:

God, please tell me about one person who needs to know about Jesus.

Listen for God to speak to you. When you have one person's name, tell God thank you and ask Him to help you tell this person about Jesus.



CLOSING:

Explain that just like the men in the Bible story, we have the privilege of being able to bring people to Jesus. We can bring people to church and tell them about Jesus' love. Ask each student to draw a picture of the person who God spoke to them about. Help them write this person's name, with the heading:

I can show love to _____, because love comes from God.

OPTIONAL ITEMS:

Snack idea: Give each child one graham cracker, a few chocolate chips, a few small marshmallows, and two or three teddy bear-shaped graham crackers.

Have the children scatter the small marshmallows and the chocolate chips on their graham crackers then put the teddy bear-shaped graham crackers on top.

Carefully transfer the snacks onto a cookie sheet. Have an adult helper put the cookie sheet in the oven at 375 degrees for about five minutes. Watch carefully so that the marshmallows don't burn. If an oven is not available, use a microwave or toaster oven.

Make a card: Encourage kids to make a card for one special person. Encourage children to choose a person who could benefit from receiving more of God's love—shown through them.

Ask children to decorate construction paper cards with a variety of craft supplies. After the cards are finished, have kids show them and tell about the special people who will receive them.



Temple Time - Lesson 1

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Joyfully knowing God loves me. (L4)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God is hoping to show us His love.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

Even though parents are the primary models, ministry leaders and Bible study teachers are important contributors to the picture children develop of God. Positive faith experiences in the classroom help a child develop a positive attitude about himself, the relationships in his world and his God. Additionally, by helping children develop a healthy self-concept at the same time we teach concepts of faith, increases the likelihood that they will have a trusting relationship with God (Leatherwood, 2012).

A strength of this stage is the ability to integrate story with personal experience, therefore inviting students to put themselves into a biblical story and then to interact about relevant experiences, builds upon the elementary child's developmental focus (Fowler, 2012).

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- white paper
- cotton swabs
- vinegar
- iron

Students will:

- ★ learn what it means to "hope" for something
- ★ understand how God is hoping to show us His love
- ★ experience an image of Christ who "can't wait to show us His love!"
- ★ experience the Bible verse: Psalm 32:11
- ★ rejoice in how they are loved by Jesus

Key Scripture Passage: Mark 10:13-16

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

Psalm 32:11

Be glad in the Lord... and shout for joy!

PREPARATION

Prior to your meeting time, teachers will create a "secret message" for each child who may attend the session. To create the secret message, use a sheet of white paper, dip a cotton swab into vinegar and write these words, "I can't wait to show you my love! -From, Jesus." Write these words in large print.

[You may also want to show pictures of Jesus welcoming the children. You can find excellent pictures of Jesus holding children on these websites: www.jesuspictures4you.com and www.oxygen-multimedia.com]



INTRODUCTION

[As students arrive, teachers will want to notice special character traits that are unique to each child. Be sure to be able to affirm one positive trait about each child before the end of the lesson. Is this child: kind, caring, bold, courageous, creative, generous, unselfish, flexible, etc?]

As children arrive, give them their secret message and invite them to come to the table to *decode* their secret message. Have an adult ready with an iron and ironing board or towel on the tabletop. The adult helps the students iron their secret message until they are able to see the message from Jesus.

Provide blank white paper, cotton swabs and vinegar so that students can write their own secret messages (or draw secret pictures) too!

OUTER COURT:

Gives an illustration that helps define the word, "HOPE": Think back to the night before your first day of school. Perhaps you were excited about who was going to be in your classroom this year. Did you hope your best friend was going to be in your class? Perhaps you were wondering who your teacher was going to be. Did you hope that your teacher would be interesting and make learning lots of fun? These were all "hopes" that you may have had for your new school year.

Have you ever hoped to see someone? Have you wanted to see someone or something so badly, that you just can't wait to see them?"

Allow several students to answer.

In today's story, we will learn how Jesus hopes for something. He hopes that we will be His friend; He can't wait to show us how much He loves us. In fact, he couldn't wait to leave His home in heaven, come to our world and make a way so that we could be in His family forever!

Tell the story of Jesus welcoming the children in your own words:

- ★ Jesus begins teaching inside a house in Perea.
- ★ Parents were bringing their children to see Jesus.
- ★ The disciples tried to stop the children from seeing Jesus; they thought He was too busy with "important" things.

Ask the children what Jesus thought about this situation and why. Then have all the children open their Bibles to Mark 10:13-15, read the story together and find out!

- ★ Jesus was angry with the disciples for stopping the children because He couldn't wait to see them.
- ★ Jesus was HOPING to see the children. He wanted to talk with them, hold them and give them a blessing. He was HOPING to SHOW THEM HIS LOVE!

Next, encourage children to act out this same Bible story. Ask one of the adults (or one of the children) to play the role of Jesus. He/she stands on one side of the room. Ask one of the adults to play the role of the disciple(s) and stand in the middle of the room. All other students stand opposite of Jesus.



Jesus begins by motioning to the children, "Come on over kids, I can't wait to see you! (Make sure that "Jesus" is enthusiastic with His welcome and invitation. We want to convey how Christ "can't wait to love them!)

Tell the children to begin walking quickly towards Jesus. The adult(s) who are pretending to be the disciples, try to stop the children. The "disciples" will want to be gentle, but silly as they try to stop the children. "Oh, no you don't! Jesus is toooooo busy!" "Wait, you can't go over there. Jesus has more important things to do!"

Jesus then jokingly rebukes the disciples, "Don't stop the children from coming to me! They are very important to me. I can't wait to show them My love."

Play the game a few times, encouraging children to run to Jesus. Let them see Christ's enthusiasm and how He is hoping to show them His love.



After you have played the game several times, close the activity with the following: Have all the children sit in a circle. Ask the person who is pretending to be Jesus to walk around the outside of the circle and either touch each child on the head/shoulders or take their hands and gently give each child a special blessing. Jesus will want to call each child by name and affirm a specific character trait for each child (A blessing includes words of affirmation or approval especially in regards to someone's future.)

A blessing might sound like, "Nathan, You are growing up to be such a kind young man. I can't wait to see what great things you do!" "Erin, you are so creative! I can tell that God is going to use your special talents!" [If you have more than 8-10 children, teachers may want to divide the children into smaller groups for this activity. Several teachers will then give each child a blessing.]

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Psalm 32:11

Bring the children back to a large group. Discuss these points:

Jesus really is HOPING to show us love. Although we can't see Him, He is up in heaven and He can't wait to show us His love. Just like our story, Jesus is hoping that we will come to Him and talk with Him in prayer. Just like our story, Jesus can't wait to show us that He loves us.

How does it make you feel when you remember that Jesus can't wait to show us He loves us? (happy, thankful, excited etc.)

How did it feel to hear the kind words from your teachers today?

Jesus thinks those very same things about you! He loves you and notices the special things about you.

Let's go into our Temple Time and tell Jesus how it makes us feel to know how He loves us. During your time in the Temple, let's take off our shoes and enter quietly. As you have your special time with Jesus, simply talk to Him. You might tell Him words like this:

Jesus, I'm so glad you love me! I'm so happy that you can't wait to show me your love!

Give time for each child to talk to Jesus and tell Him about the gladness in their heart.

CLOSING:

Let's end our time by doing a Bible verse that talks about those same feelings.

Psalm 32:11 "Be glad in the Lord . . . shout for joy!"

This Bible verse tells us to shout for joy when we feel glad about all the things that the Lord has done for us. Let's do that now.

Play Hug Tag – Give these instructions: "I'll tell you how to move around the room. When I turn off the lights, give the person closest to you a gentle hug. Is everyone ready? Take lots of giant steps, and move around the room." Give children time to take several giant steps. Then turn off the lights and say, "Hug tag! Gently hug the person closest to you!"

Give other movement directions such as "take heel-to-toe steps," "twirl around the room," "jump," "crawl on your hands and knees," etc. After you give each instruction, allow time for children to follow it, then turn off the lights and have them hug each other.

End each round of the game by saying, "God is hoping to show us His love, just like Jesus did with the children of the story. Let's shout for joy: I'm so glad God can't wait to love me!"

Snack ideas: Hershey's Hugs and Hershey's Kisses, Oreo Cookies



Temple Time - Lesson 2

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Praying and believing each day. (L8)

Key Concept for this Lesson: Jesus prays for us and would like for us to join Him in prayer.

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- plain, light colored paper
- crayons or markers
- costume for the character of Jesus

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

"Morning, noon and night I will pray . . . and the Lord hears my voice." (NLT)

Psalms 55:17

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

By investigating the meaning and function of prayer for children, Dr. Vivienne Mountain discovered that regardless of faith tradition or even in the absence of any connection to religion, children perceive prayer as a way to connect with a good God. They believe that prayer is a way to cope with difficult experiences and is used as at important times to clarify and articulate deep feelings (Mountain, 2007). Dr. Mountain's research underscores the importance of teaching children how to pray. Preschoolers are open to the opportunity of meaningful relationship through prayer, they simply need guidance, encouragement and intentional times set aside for prayer.

Teaching children to pray is a critical part of introducing them to Jesus and helping them develop their own personal relationship with God. If we want our children to truly know God, and not just know about Him, teaching children to pray is essential. After all, the closest of relationships requires consistent, intentional, meaningful conversation

Students will:

- ★ share one positive event and one painful event of their week
- ★ experience the image of a Christ who prays for them
- ★ experience the Bible verse, Psalm 55:17. Each child will say a prayer to the Lord
- ★ demonstrate a bold and believing prayer as they pray with another friend

Key Scripture Passages: Luke 11:1; Luke 22:32; Heb. 7:25

PREPARATION

- ★ Create a private place in the room that represents the "special places where Jesus went alone to pray."

- ★ Designate one adult to play the role of Jesus. Make a simple costume that helps the students visualize the image of Jesus. [Or you may want a male adult behind a screen to produce a silhouette of Jesus?]

INTRODUCTION

As students arrive, ask students to draw a picture that represents the best thing that happened to them this week and a picture of one hard, or sad thing that has happened this week. As students draw their pictures, teachers will want to ask questions in order to clarify the feelings, events and details of the pictures. (Each child's responses will be important for a following activity.) Teachers will also want to model their own examples of positive and painful events with corresponding pictures. Share your own pictures as a model of vulnerability, just making sure that your topics are age appropriate.

OUTER COURT:

Ask the students to assist you in acting out the story of Luke 11.

Tell the story with these events: [Teachers may want to think of motions that the kids can do as you tell this story - in order to keep them engaged.]



- ★ Jesus often went outside and found a place where He could talk to God. He took time to pray to God.
- ★ One time, Jesus went off by himself to pray and He prayed all night. Then the next morning Jesus invited several of his friends to join Him on the mountain. After He had finished praying, Jesus told these friends that He wanted them to be His disciples – His special followers.
- ★ One time when Jesus went alone to pray, He prayed for the disciples because He knew they were about to be in boat during a terrible storm
- ★ Another time when Jesus went alone to pray, one of His disciples listened in on what Jesus was praying.
- ★ When the disciple heard Jesus praying to God, He asked Jesus to help him learn to pray. Jesus must have been saying some very important things in His prayer. I wonder what Jesus must have said?

Close the story with these comments:

Jesus knew that it was very important to talk with God and spend time in prayer. Have you ever wondered what Jesus was praying? What would Jesus be talking to God about?

Allow students to give a few responses.

The Bible gives us an idea of what Jesus talks to God about. In one Bible story, Jesus tells his disciple, Peter that He had been talking to God about Peter! Jesus was praying for Peter! In another Bible verse, we find out that Jesus is actually in heaven



right now and He is still praying. In fact, the Bible says that the main thing that Jesus is doing right now, is praying for you and me!

Teachers will want to make sure that the adult, who is playing the role of Jesus, has a list of each child's positive and painful event. "Jesus" then begins praying for each child.

Teachers lead the children toward the place of prayer. "Let's move towards the place where Jesus is praying and let's see if we can hear His words."

Jesus' words might sound like the following (Be sure to convey the feelings Christ must feel as He sees our positive and painful events. This is not the time that Jesus is preaching or telling the kids how they should live, but this is the time to convey how our lives make an impact on Christ's heart. We want to convey what Jesus feels for us – joy, sadness, hurt, excitement etc.):

"God, I am so glad that Jonathan got to go swimming this week. I know how much he enjoys swimming. Please help Jonathan and his brother know how to love one another better. It makes me sad to know that they had a fight." "God, thank you for giving Meagan a chance to see her grandma this week. I was excited when I saw how much fun they had together. Please bring comfort to Meagan's heart. It makes me sad that she misses her Dad."

Close this time with these questions:

How did you feel as you heard Jesus praying for you?

(happy, glad, loved etc.)

We were able to listen to Jesus praying, just like the disciple in our story. After the disciple heard Jesus praying, he wanted to pray too. I wonder if some of you would like to pray to God today too?

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Psalm 55:17

Let's go into the Temple and talk to God, just like Jesus was doing. When we go into the temple this time, we're going to pray for one another. Together with a partner, you might want to thank God for the good things that happened this week and ask God to help your friend with the hard things that happened.

When we say our prayers, we will be doing a Bible verse that is a great promise from God. Our Bible verse says, "Morning, noon and night I will pray . . . and the Lord hears my voice." (Psalm 55:17) When we pray during this time, we can be sure that God hears our voice. He has promised to do that.

Teachers invite students to take off their shoes as they go into the temple. Send groups of two or three into the temple and encourage student to pray for one another.

Thank you, God that my friend...

God, please help my friend to...

CLOSING:

As students finish their time in the temple, teachers close with this activity.



Do a bouncing prayer: Have kids think of two things they would like to say to God (it might be thanking Him for the positive event and asking for God's help with their painful event of the week.) Then gather kids in a circle. Stand in the middle and gently bounce the ball to a child. When the child catches the ball, have him or her say the prayer to God and then bounce the ball back to you. Bounce the ball to children randomly until everyone has prayed.

Teachers might also teach the Bible verse in sign language as a closing.

OPTIONAL ITEMS:

Snack ideas: Crushed vanilla wafers, grated coconut, powdered sugar and thawed orange juice concentrate. Help the children mix the ingredients together, roll the dough into small balls, and roll the balls into an additional bowl of powdered sugar.

Talk about how even though all of the ingredients are mixed together in our snack, we can still taste the "special-ness" of each one. Our prayers are like this. Even though we all talk to God at once, He still hears our prayers and the special concerns of each person in the room.



Temple Time - Lesson 3

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Listening to God's Word as it speaks to my heart. (W1)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God loves us so much that He wrote us a letter so that we can learn about His love.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

- *string or yarn
- *paper bag
- *Bible
- *personal letter
- *treasure box
- *child's story book
- *lively music
- *small treats or prizes
- *sheet of music
- *instruction manual or rule book from a board game

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED:

Psalm 119:162
"I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."
(NLT)

Students will:

- *understand that the Bible is written so that we can learn about God's love for us.
- *enjoy an activity that shows how each part of the Bible reveals God's love – even the rules He gives to us!
- *experience the Bible verse: Psalm 119:162 "I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."
- *Express their love to God because of how He has shown His love through the Bible.

Key Scripture Passages: Psalm 119:162

PREPARATION

Before children arrive, use string or yarn to make a path that leads children to a "treasure." You may want to only allow two or three children into the room at the same time. Connect the string to chairs, tables, and higher objects. Make the path difficult enough that children have to follow the string carefully in order to find the hidden treasure. Once a child has found the treasure, encourage them to sit down and enjoy his/her snack, being careful not to give away the location of the treasure.

Hide the treasure (A Bible and small pieces of candy or other treats.)



INTRODUCTION

Begin the lesson by inviting students to join you in a Bible treasure hunt! After all children have found the treasure and are enjoying their treats, explain that in today's lesson we are learning about how God loves us so much that He gave us the Bible to tell us about His love. Our Bible verse today says, "I rejoice in Your Word like one who finds a great treasure."

Today we will talk about how special the Bible is and how it is like a great treasure because it tells us about all the ways that God loves us.

OUTER COURT:

Teachers will need their Bible and a paper bag filled with a personal letter, a storybook, a sheet of music and an instruction manual or rule book for the next illustration.

Show the kids the Bible and say, "The Bible looks like an ordinary book but it's not. It is filled with many different kinds of books, but they all tell us about one great thing!

Have volunteers reach into the bag and pull out the items one at a time. As each item is pulled out, ask kids if they can identify the item. Use these explanations to show them how the Bible is like the item.

Personal letter: Explain that the Bible contains lots of different personal letters. There were several writers who wrote letters to different people, telling them about all the ways that God loves us. The writers cared so much about their friends, that they wanted their friends to know the good news about God's love. In fact, the whole Bible is like a letter from God to us – telling us about how much He loves us!

The storybook: Tell the kids that the Bible is full of exciting stories like David and Goliath and how Jesus healed the man who couldn't walk. But all of these stories are written so that we can see how God loved the people of the Bible and how He loves us the same way. God loved David so much that He helped him do a very hard thing – like beating a giant named Goliath. God loved the man who couldn't walk so much that He sent Jesus to make him well. God loves us just the same.

The sheet of music: Tell the kids that the Bible has many songs in it. Many of these songs are written to celebrate all of the ways that God shows His love. We can read about the ways that God loved other people and sing the same songs. We can celebrate God's love too!

Finally, the rule book/instruction manual: Tell the kids that the Bible gives us instructions on how to follow God. The Bible gives us rules that are important for us to follow, just like this rule/instruction book. One of the rules God gives us is "Do not steal." Even though God gave us this rule, He did so because He knows that stealing makes people sad. Have you ever had something stolen? God gave us this rule because He loves us and doesn't want us to feel sad. Even God's rules tell us that He loves us!

Play lively music during this next activity. Have the children sit in a circle and pass a treasure box around while the music plays. When the music stops ask students to finish the following sentence. (You might even want to put a Bible inside a treasure chest, pass the treasure around the circle while the music is played. When the music stops, the person who is holding the treasure chest finishes the sentence).

Teachers will ask students to share what they like most about God's Word. What part of the Bible are you most thankful for?

Thank you God, for putting _____ in the Bible.

I think you're a great Author because...

Teachers will want to demonstrate several possible responses for the kids. Be sure to give your own vulnerable response as well. What are you (as the teacher) really thankful for? Such as, "Thank you God, for putting stories in the Bible. You're a great author because we can read about all the great things that Jesus did." Or "Thank you God, for putting music in the Bible. You're a great author because we can sing the songs that talk about your love." Remind the students that as you complete this exercise, you will be "doing" the Bible verse for the day. You will be rejoicing about God's Word.

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Psalm 119:162

Invite students to go into the temple and have a private conversation with God. Encourage them to take the ideas that were just shared in the large group and share their own celebrations with Jesus.

Let's take off our shoes and enter into the temple. For this time in the temple, we want to take a Bible into the temple with us and then tell God what parts we are most grateful for about His Book. When you have your special time with God, be sure to tell Him what you are thankful for:

God, I'm especially glad you put _____ into the Bible.

You're a great Author because...





CLOSING:

Serve fruit roll ups as you close the lesson. Explain how the Bible was first written onto scrolls. Roll ups are similar to the scrolls of Jesus' day.

OPTIONAL ITEMS:

Make your own Bible: Provide an assortment of magazine pictures that show love (as well as things that represent "rules," "music," "stories" and "letters.") Give students glue and construction paper folded in half with two holes punched $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in from the crease and 2 inches from the top and bottom. You'll also need plenty of yarn.

Separate students into small groups of three or four. Give each group one folded sheet of construction paper. Have each child choose a picture to glue onto one page of the book. Tell students that they are making a book about love, so to make sure to choose a picture that makes them think of love. Tell children to save room for words to be written on the pages.

As children finish, gather their books together one on top of the other so that the holes line up. Put a strand of yarn through the holes and tie it; this will bind the books together to make one big book. Tell students that this is how the Bible was written. With God's help, many people wrote books that were all put together to make one big book – the Bible.

Finally, ask students to help you decide what words to write onto the pages of the book. Explain that God helped the writers of the Bible know what to write and then the writers put down the words. Choose one picture at a time and ask children to tell how this picture reminds us of God's love. Do several pictures to illustrate the process.

When finished, say: "We've made our own special book about God's love. The Bible is God's special book about love, and God gave it to us to enjoy."



Temple Time - Lesson 4

Spirit Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Practicing thankfulness. (L1)

Key Concept: God shows His love to us and we can show our love for Him.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

Children aren't born feeling grateful. They don't come into the world knowing the importance of saying, "Thanks." Gratitude is a skill, habit and spiritual outcome that has to be modeled. It has to be taught. Parenting expert, Betsy Brown Braun explains it this way: "The seeds of gratitude have to be cultivated. Through saying, "Thank you" and writing thank you notes, children behave themselves into right thinking. to feel it, they must think it first."

We know that it's simply good manners to say, "Thank you," but feelings of gratitude can also help people lead happier lives. Grateful people are more resilient, have higher self-esteem, and are generally more fulfilled. Children who practice gratefulness have more positive attitudes toward school and their families (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). Both common sense and research confirm that cultivating gratitude in our children is a good idea. It's up to the adults in their lives to model gratitude, teach them to think, feel and express gratitude to God and to others. After all, we were created to give honor, glory and gratitude to God.

"A life contemplating the blessings of Christ becomes a life expressing the love of Christ." Ann Voskamp

SUPPLIES

Classroom with
Temple Time Area
white bed sheet
markers

BIBLE VERSE

EXPERIENCED:

I WILL GIVE
THANKS TO YOUR
NAME FOR YOUR
UNFAILING LOVE
AND FAITHFULNESS.

PSALM 138:2

STUDENTS WILL:

- *learn about the story of the ten lepers
- *understand that god has given us many things to show us His love. We can show our love for Him by giving Him thanks.
- *experience the Bible verse: Psalm 138:2 and practice thanksgiving to the Lord.

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE: LUKE 17:11-19



PREPARATION

Before students arrive place a large white bed sheet on to the ground or push several tables together and spread the sheet on top of the tables. Draw a picture of Jesus in the very center of the sheet.

INTRODUCTION

As students arrive ask them to use markers to draw pictures of all the things that God has given them or done for them to show His love. Students are to draw pictures all around the edges of the bed sheet.

Encourage children and prompt them with ideas such as:

God has given you a family, a church, friends, and teachers. He's given you all these things—God shows His love through these people.

God gives us food to eat and a house to live in. These are some of the ways that He takes care of us and shows us His love.

God gives us plenty of air to breathe, sunshine for the daytime and the moon at night. These are some of the ways that God has provided and we don't even have to ask for them.

Be sure to model your own gratitude for God's provision; draw pictures of the things you are grateful for before the children arrive in the classroom.

As soon as you see that students have drawn several pictures, begin the Bible story.

OUTER COURT

Bringing a Bible, go to the Outer Court area for Temple Time. To help keep kids engaged in this story, teachers might ask students to do a certain sign for the words, "Jesus," "sick," and "thank you." Sign language may be used or certain signs that teachers designate.

- ★ As Jesus walked toward Jerusalem one day, He met ten men who were very sick. They had sores and cuts all over their body; bandages covered their hands, face and feet.
- ★ The men were so sick that they were not allowed to get close to other people. They could never hug or touch another person because others might get sick too. These men couldn't even be at home with their families.
- ★ These ten men had heard that Jesus could heal people who were sick and they wanted to be healed too. They stood far away from Jesus and called out to Him, "Jesus, please help us!"
- ★ Jesus looked at the men and felt very sad for them. He knew they must have felt lonely and missed their families very much. Jesus felt compassion for these men; He knew their sickness had been very hard.
- ★ Jesus told the men to go to the temple and they would be healed.



- ★ Just as Jesus said, as the men traveled to the church, they were healed! Their cuts and sores were gone!
- ★ One of the men stopped, turned around went back to Jesus. The man came back to Jesus and fell at His feet. He thanked Jesus for healing him, praising God for what He had done.
- ★ Jesus was so glad to see the man and was very happy to hear the words, “Thank you.” It made Jesus sad, though, to know that only one man remembered to say “thank you.”

In today’s story, only one man remembered to tell Jesus, “thank you.” Jesus loved all ten men and showed His love by making them well. But only one man remembered to say, “thank you.”

Have you ever done anything nice for someone and they forgot to say, “Thank you?” How did you feel?

Today, we don’t want to make the same mistake that those nine other men did. We don’t want to forget to give our thanks to Jesus. Why?

We don’t want Jesus to feel sad because we love Him.

So, let’s spend a few minutes remembering some of the ways that God has shown His love to us. You have drawn some pictures that help us remember God’s love for us. Now, let’s show God OUR LOVE! Let’s say “Thank you” to Him because when we remember to say, “Thanks”— Jesus feels loved!

INNER COURT

Due to the attention span, the Listening and Prayer Center should be no longer than 5-6 minutes each. Be sensitive to the development of your students and transition sooner if they get wiggly! Temple Time should be a flexible and enjoyable ministry experience, not a rigid exercise.

Invite students to go quietly into the inner court of the Temple for their private conversation with God. Say, “Now that you have thought about the special ways that God has shown His love for you. Let’s go into the Temple and talk to Him about our thanks.”

Instruct the children to go into the Temple area, take off their shoes and spend just a few minutes talking to God. Encourage them to think about the picture they drew and then tell God “Thank you.”

As children finish their prayer times with God, celebrate the way they have loved the Lord. “Wow, I know God must feel so loved right now. He heard your thanks and that must make Him smile!” You have lived out Psalm 138:2!

CLOSING

Teachers will lead students in a “Thankful Parade.” Have children march around the room, holding the sheet (rolled up length-wise) while praise music is played in the room. Let students stand on either side of the sheet and raise the sheet high in the air as the teacher leads them around the room. Periodically, stop the music and ask individual children, “What are you thankful for?” Reaffirm their answers by saying,

"Yes, that's another way that God shows us His love!"

Close the lesson with the kids by asking them to hold the edges of the sheet and spread it out as large as possible. Say, "Let's end our time with one more expression of our love for Jesus. We can show Him our love by thanking Him for the ways that He has loved us. Let's lift this sheet high above our heads, lifting our thanks to God. When we do, let's say our Bible verse for today, "I will give thanks for your love!" Psalm 138:2.

Pretend the sheet is a parachute and lift the sheet high above the children's heads. You might ask one child at a time to run underneath the sheet as it is lifted. Encourage them to say their words of thanks: "Thank you Jesus for..."

After each child has had a turn, ask children to shout the Bible verse in unison. Lift the sheet high above your heads and say, "I will give thanks for Your love!"

Optional Ideas:

Snack ideas: Heart shaped Jello Jigglers.

Thankful Murals: Hang four separate sheets of butcher paper around the room. Draw a picture of a house, a school, a church and a swing set – to symbolize a playground. Provide only four colors of crayons for the students, but make sure that there is plenty of crayons for everyone.

Explain that each piece of paper represents a different area of life – family, school, church and friends. Give each child a crayon and ask them find the others with the same color. Have each group go to a different sheet of paper.

Explain that they each have one minute to draw something on their paper that they are thankful for in that area of life. One person might draw a picture of their Mom or their Dad onto the paper with the house. Another person might draw a picture of a cross because they are thankful for the chance to come to church and learn about Jesus. When kids understand, ring a bell to start the drawing. When a minute is up, ring the bell again and have each group race to the next sheet of paper.

When all kids have drawn on all four sheets, take a tour of all the drawings and talk about how much we have to be thankful for. Compliment kids on their great ideas.

Play a game: If You Love Jesus, Please Smile

Have children sit in a circle. Choose a volunteer to be "it." It must go around the circle and say to each child, "If you love Jesus, please smile." It can do anything to get a child to smile as long as he or she doesn't touch the child. No tickling allowed!

The other players must resist smiling and say, "I really love Jesus, but I just can't smile." If a smile occurs, the smiling player becomes It.

Temple Time - Lesson 5

Spirit-Empowered Discipleship Outcome: Thanking Jesus for helping us to love others. (P10)

Key Concept for this Lesson: God loves us and wants us to love others.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

s Research and intro paragraphs here

Students will:

- learn the story of Zacchaeus and how Jesus loved him even though he did wrong things.
- experience the image of Jesus who loves them “even though . . .”
- pray FOR another friend, asking God to help their friend change in important ways.
- think of ways that they might show this same kind of love to others, “even though they . . .”

Key Scripture Passages: Luke 19:1-6

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, designate two adults to act as Zacchaeus and one person to act as Jesus. You may even want the individuals who are pretending to be Zacchaeus to practice their character’s movements and dialogue before showing the kids. Set up the props and table for Zacchaeus to quickly get into costume.

INTRODUCTION

As children arrive invite them to play a game of Freeze Tag. The rules are as follows: Someone will be “It” for the game. When “It” tags a child, he or she must freeze in that same spot.

SUPPLIES

Supplies you will need:

*clothes and props for Zacchaeus

*step ladder or stool

*jellybeans

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED:

Romans 15:7
“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you.” (NLT)



Frozen children may not move around until a friend comes up and touches them, “unfreezing” them so that they can continue to play. Everyone must care for one another, (even though they may not know everyone or be the closest friends) or everyone will end up frozen.

After kids have played several times, say, “One of the reasons why I like this game is because in order to play the game and keep it fun, we have to care for one another – even though we may not know everyone in the room, or even though others may be different from us. If we wanted the game to still be fun, we had to help one another – even though . . .”

Explain that in today’s lesson we will learn how Jesus loved a man named Zacchaeus, even though Zacchaeus stole from others, cheated, lied and was very unkind to his neighbors. Even though Zacchaeus did these things, Jesus loved him.

OUTER COURT:

Teachers may want to create a special character to tell this story. The optical illusion of this character creates a terrifically short character. One person should kneel behind a table and pull a pair of large shorts up around his/her arms until the shorts reach the elbows. Person #1 puts his hands inside a pair of tennis shoes and places their arms on top of a table. Person #1 has now created the “legs” for Zacchaeus.

A second person pulls a large T-shirt over Person #1’s head and pulls the shirt down until it can be tucked inside the shorts. Person #2 then kneels or sits closely behind the first person so he/she cannot be seen. Person #2 puts his/her arms through the sleeves of the T-shirt and has now created the “arms” for Zacchaeus.

Practice retelling the Bible story as the character, Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus may want to brush his hair before going to the market. Show the arm and leg movements as Zacchaeus walks to town, climbs the tree and waves to Jesus. Zacchaeus might shade his eyes as he looks for Jesus or stroke his beard as he tries to decide the amount of tax. Make it fun to watch as you tell the story of Zacchaeus.

*Zacchaeus walks down the road with his eyes looking only at the ground.

*The town’s people call him names and even throw rocks.

*Zacchaeus enters the market place as the big gate is opened.

*Zacchaeus talks with the people who are there to sell their goods.


*Zacchaeus looks in their carts and sometimes steals from the people.

*Zacchaeus makes a man or woman pay more money than the next, just because he wants more money from himself.

*Zacchaeus hears people calling out the name, “Jesus”. He tries to see this famous teacher who everyone has been talking about.

*Zacchaeus climbs the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus.

*The crowd begins to laugh at Zacchaeus and make fun of him when they notice that he is in the tree.



*Jesus walks over to Zacchaeus and calls to him with a kind voice. Jesus tells Zacchaeus that He would like to be his friend and to have a meal with him.

*After Zacchaeus has dinner with Jesus, he gives back all the money that he had ever stolen and even more!

*Jesus loved Zacchaeus even though he had done things that were wrong. Jesus loved Zacchaeus even though he had done things that were unkind. Jesus loves us even though we sometimes do things that are wrong and unkind too.

Teachers will want to bring a stepladder or some other ladder into the classroom for this activity. After the story, ask students to think of a time when they did something wrong or unkind to others. Ask children to think of that time and remember it. One by one, ask children to climb the ladder and tell about the time when they were unkind to other people or did something that they knew was wrong (As they climb the step ladder they are pretending to be like Zacchaeus – they know they’ve done things that were wrong, but want to see Jesus). Teachers will want to be the first ones to model this activity. You will want to climb the stepladder yourself and tell the children about a real event in your life when your own behavior was less than perfect (keeping the age of the children in mind). Then receive Jesus’ words of acceptance for you!

After each child has finished telling his story, have one adult (who is pretending to be Jesus) welcome the child down from the ladder. Jesus might say, “Come on down, Jacob. I love you even though those things happened!” “Come on down, Leah. I love you even though you made some wrong choices!” (Make sure that Jesus gives a warm, accepting greeting to the children. We know that this was Christ’s response, because Scripture tells us that Zacchaeus came down from the tree with gladness in his heart.)

Teachers will explain how Jesus loves us even though we sometimes do things that are wrong and unkind. He wants us to show that same kind of love to others. Even though people around us may do wrong things or say unkind words, because Jesus has shown us love, we can show love to others.

Our Bible verse for today is: Romans 15:7 “Accept one another just as Christ has accepted you.” This means that because Jesus has loved us when we are wrong or unkind, we can show this same love for others.”

How does it make you feel to know that Jesus welcomes you and loves you even though you’ve done the things you talked about on the ladder?

What are some things we can do to show others that we love them even when they do things that are wrong or unkind?

Allow several children to respond. Then tell the following story. Ask students to pretend that they are in the story. Each time that you stop the story, ask kids to think of all the kind things that they could do.

One day, several of your friends were building a clubhouse. You all worked together to build this terrific clubhouse! You carefully cut the boards and nailed them together. You even painted the windows and doors. It was great! Everyone was having a good time until Carson shoved Kara. A huge fight broke out. What loving thing could you do, even though Carson did something that was unkind?

Next, you and your friends built a racetrack for your bikes. You smoothed it out, made turns and hills and valleys and made flags to mark the different areas of the course. You started your first practice race around the track. Lincoln was just about to win the race when Jennifer accidentally fell in the middle of the track. Everyone crashed their bikes - on the first race! What loving thing could you do, even though Jennifer accidentally did something that disappointed others?

Allow children to make suggestions of how to accept one another even when wrong or unkind things are done. Teachers may need to model or make suggestions about what to say.

INNER COURT: Experiencing the Bible verse - Romans 15:7

Next, invite students to enter into the temple. During this temple time students will take off their shoes and go into the temple with one other friend.

Pair up the students and then prep them for their time in the temple.

Talk to your friend about what you need God to help you change. Do you need God to help you be more kind? more patient? more gentle with your words? more respectful? Tell your friend how you need God's help.

I need God to help me be more _____.

While you are in the temple, you will pray FOR your friend. You will ask God to help your friend with whatever they just shared. Say a prayer about your friend. Ask God to help them. This is one way that we can show acceptance to others. We can pray for them and show that we care. That might sound like this:

God, please help my friend be more gentle with his words. God please help my friend be more respectful to his mom or dad.

CLOSING:

After students have finished their temple time, give each child a handful of jellybeans. Ask them to create a picture with the jellybeans that reminds them of how Jesus loves us even though we do wrong things and how we can do the same for others. Close the time by asking children to think of one person who needs their acceptance. Ask children to finish the sentence, "I want God to help me show His love to my _____."

Temple Time - Lesson 6

Discipleship Outcome: Sharing with the poor. (M5)

Key Concept: God is always busy loveing other people and wants us to join Him.



SUPPLIES

Bible

Classroom with
Temple Time Area

Paper sack filled
with party
decorations

Supplies to create
a "house" in the
classroom

A greeting card
and markers for
each child

Graham crackers

Marshmallow
cream

Chocolate chips

Teddy grahams

BIBLE VERSE EXPERIENCED

**Let us continue
to love one
another because
love comes from
God. 1 John 4:7**

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REMINDERS

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGE : Luke 5:17 - 26

many times, Christians consider prayer a one-sided endeavor where we talk to God. Spirit-empowered believers, however, would likely agree it is more accurate to describe prayer as one element in *communication with God*. Rather than a merely one-sided conversation, the term *communication* implies an exchange of information or a dialogue. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines communication as *a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior* (www.m-w.com, 2012). This definition of communication is also especially appropriate because it refers to *symbols, signs, or behavior*. God does not always speak in an audible voice to believers, but often uses signs and wonders (Acts 14:3), dreams (Acts 2:17), visions (Acts 16:9), and a *still, small voice* (1 Kings 19:12 KJV).

Consequently, Spirit-empowered believers should expect prayer to include times of both talking and listening. It is important to note there is a difference between *hearing* and *listening*. Hearing is the physical process of perceiving sound. Side note: For the hearing impaired, hearing is considered the visual recognition of sign language. According to the International Listening Association, *listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages* (1996). It is possible to *hear* someone (I know what they said) but not *listen* (I have no idea what it means, and I am not offering a response).

Is it necessary to help elementary students improve their listening skills in the overall context of communication with God? The National Communication Association indicates that few students receive any kind of explicit communication skills instruction (2009). They also stress that, *Communication training at this early age can help the student succeed in school and life* (www.natcom.org, 2009). Likewise, receiving training to improve listening skills during prayer may help students connect spiritually as well.

Finally, since students are in the process of learning, it is vital to stress that any true message received by listening for God will also agree with the Bible. For instance, God would never tell a student to physically *knock some sense* into a sibling. Such an action would violate 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 and the development of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). It is important to emphasize Christians “submit one to another in love out of reverence to Christ” (Eph. 5:20) when it comes to receiving and sharing words.

STUDENTS WILL:

Understand that God often involves other people to help Him share His love, as they hear the story of Jesus and the paralytic.

- ★ express love and compassion to other friends with words of care
- ★ ask God to show them who might need some of their caring words, written in a card.
- ★ make plans to express love to people outside of the classroom by giving their cards.

PREPARATION

- ★ You will need a paper sack filled with decorations such as streamers, balloons, party hats, noisemakers, banners, and festive tablecloths.
- ★ As children arrive, show them the sack’s contents and give each child one decoration. Have kids contribute to decorating the entire room. As they finish decorating say, “Our party today is to celebrate God’s love. During these last several weeks we’ve learned about many of the ways that God loves us. Today we are going to have a party to celebrate His love. We will also get to practice loving one another today. Our Bible verse today says, ‘Let us continue to love one another because love comes from God.’ Let’s learn about some friends who showed God’s love to one special man.”
- ★ Teachers will want to create a “house” for the children to sit in while you tell this story. Arrange tables by turning them on their sides and setting them next to each other so the tabletops and legs form a rectangle. Tape newspaper or newspapers over the top to form a roof.

INTRODUCTION-OUTER COURT

Gather the children inside the house and tell this story. Involve the children by asking them to follow you as you tell the story with hand motions that go with specific words. Teachers designate signs or sign language to go with these words: "Jesus," "help," "friend."

- ★ One day, Jesus went to a town called Capernaum.
- ★ The people were so excited that Jesus was coming to their town – they helped tell everyone the news.
- ★ Lots of people packed inside of a house to listen to Jesus teach.
- ★ But there were four men who wanted to help their friend get inside the house too. Their friend was paralyzed—he couldn't move his legs at all.
- ★ The man had to lie on a mat and be carried everywhere he went.
- ★ The four friends tried to carry the man inside the door of the house, but there were too many people—they couldn't fit.
- ★ The friends looked at the house and wondered how they were going to help the man get inside. Then they had a great idea.

Teachers: Have the children get out their Bibles (Luke 5:17-26) and find out what the "great idea" was—how were they going to get their friend to Jesus?

They decided to cut a hole in the roof and let their friend down through the hole.

- ★ They all helped carry their friend up to the roof. Then they dug and chopped until there was a hole in the roof.
- ★ Jesus looked at the paralyzed man. Then he looked up and saw the four friends. He was so happy that the four friends helped the man and believed that Jesus could help him.
- ★ Jesus said to the man, "Get up, take your mat, and go home."
- ★ Immediately the man's legs grew strong. He stood up and walked out the door.

End the story with these comments/questions: Do you think Jesus could have gone to the paralyzed man and helped him there? Certainly. Do you think that Jesus could have spoken the words and the man could have been healed? Yes, Jesus didn't even have to be with the man—He is that powerful! But this story reminds us that a lot of times, God involves other people in showing His love. In this story, God involved the four friends to help the paralyzed man see and know of God's love.

The same is true for us. God is always busy loving other people in this world. We may not be able to see Him but He shows His love for us when He protects us from harm. God shows His love when He provides jobs for mom and dad so that they can buy groceries and pay for your house. God is always busy loving you! God also likes to involve other people in showing His love. Just like the four friends in our story, God wants us to love one another, so that people will receive even more of His love.

INNER COURT

Now that children have a renewed sense of what it means to demonstrate care for their friends, encourage them to go into Temple Time. Invite them to spend a few quiet moments with Jesus in the temple. Encourage students to take off their shoes because talking to Jesus in the Temple is a special privilege in a special place.

Just like the friends who demonstrated care for their friend, we can demonstrate care for others too. Some of the people who might need our care may not be in this room. You might have a friend who needs your care. There might be a brother, sister, mom or grandparent who could benefit from your caring words.

During your temple time moments, I would like for you to take your greeting card into the temple and talk to God. Ask God two questions and then listen for His answer:

1. Who needs some of God's care right now—shown through me?
2. What words should I write to this person to show them my care?

Encourage each child to go into the Temple and spend a few minutes talking to God. Ask Him these two questions and conclude their Temple Time by writing caring words in their card for a specific person.



SHARING HIS LOVE THROUGH WORDS

Set up chairs in a circle. Put one chair in the center of the circle. Place a party hat on that chair.

Tell children that they will now get the chance to do the Bible verse, show love to one another.

Tell kids to sit in the circle of chairs. Sit in the middle and put on the party hat. Say that they will play a game where one person sits in the middle of the circle. Then we will all get the chance to say loving, kind words to this person. We will tell the person who sits in the middle some of the things we like about them.

Children might say sentences to one another like:

"I'm glad you're my friend."

"I like the way you always say kind words."

"I like you because you help me laugh."

"I'm glad that we get to play on the playground together."

"I think you're great!"

Let everyone have a chance to be in the center of the circle. Teachers can be in the center of the circle too! Affirm visitors for ways they have already contributed to the class.

CLOSING

In closing, allow children to make their snack: Building a house out of graham crackers, marshmallow cream and teddy grahams. Encourage them to share about the person who will receive their card.

"I think my Mom might need more of God's love. My card says ...

"I think my friend might need more of God's love. My card says...

OPTIONAL IDEAS

Provide a variety of craft supplies for children to decorate their cards after their Temple Time experiences. After the cards are finished, have kids show them and tell about the special people who will receive them.

