


Developing Our Relationship with GOD

Faith
is not hoping
God can
it is knowing
He **Will**



“The aim is to love God because the pure heart loves loving God and because the true mind knows He deserves it. Unlike the accusations and beliefs of the critics and skeptics, it is neither an obligation of duty; nor a fear of damnation; nor a wish for power; nor a desire to appear more righteous than others; nor because God needs it; but because through all love, truth, reason, faith, honesty, and joy in and beyond oneself and the universe, He is worthy.”

Developing a Relationship with God

Lesson 1 Believing in God

Lesson 2 Redirection of Self

Lesson 3 Making A Commitment

Lesson 4 Abraham

Lesson 5 Sarah: The Fixer

Lesson 6 Jacob: The Deceiver

Lesson 7 Joseph: The Arrogance of Youth Distorts Perspective

Lesson 8 Moses: The Disgusted Leader

Lesson 9 Elijah: The Man Who Ran

Lesson 10 Saul: Wasted Potential

Lesson 11 David: The Adulterer Who Murdered

Lesson 12 Jeremiah: The Man of Grief

Lesson 13 Jeroboam: Where Will I Find My Security?

Lesson One
To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Believing in God
Scriptures: John 3:16-21; 6:35-40; 11:17-27; Hebrews 11:6

In belonging to and serving God, there is no substitute for faith. Faith in God is not to be assumed. People come to God because they place confidence in God. Their confidence in God is not placed in a procedure, or in a religious system, or in human acts. The man or woman's confidence is placed in the God who acted in Jesus' death and resurrection. In any obedient act a person performs, the act has meaning because (and only because) God acted in Jesus' death and resurrection. Any religious system or religious movement is significant to the degree that the person places his or her confidence (trust, faith) in the God Who sacrificed Jesus' human life and raised him to eternal life to function right now as our Lord (see 1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

*Too often it is assumed that a person who places membership in a congregation or who is willing to convert does so because he or she believes in Jesus Christ. Such is not necessarily the case. Some may do either because he or she seeks (a) material opportunity, (b) benefits offered, or (c) wishes to be part of a group he or she admires. This **is not** the suggestion that Christians should seek to evaluate people's motives. It **is** the encouragement to be faith-based in our commitment to God. It **is** the encouragement to be obviously led by faith in God in all we do.*

Regardless of what attracts people to Christianity, never forget it must be faith in God that builds a relationship with God through Jesus.

Two things are basic to that confidence in God. (1) First is the understanding that God intended to send Jesus to be the Savior of humanity before sin became a reality in human existence. Read the last part of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and couple that statement with Paul's declaration in Galatians 3:23-29 [especially take note of verse 29]. Add that to Paul's statement to the Ephesians in Ephesians 1:3,4 and to the Philippians in Philippians 1:6. Also carefully consider Peter's statement in 1 Peter 1:17-21 [especially note verses 20, 21].

This is an in-depth discussion that can involve questions that lie beyond human understanding. From the biblical record it is obvious that God worked on rescuing humanity from the consequences of sin after sin became a reality. It is also obvious that sin (rebellion against God and His will) had a profound, detrimental effect on humanity (Genesis 6:5, 6). It might be that God intended (before sin) for Jesus to be a response if sin occurred. That divine plan also might involve factors beyond human comprehension.

(2) Second is the realization God patiently worked to rescue you (and all others) from evil's destructiveness for thousands of years. Consider Romans 3:21-30. Note that sin [rebellion against God and His holy nature] is a problem for all adult humans. What God did for us in Jesus' death and resurrection allowed God to freely express the ultimate divine kindness in His grace. It is through God's gift of grace every person (a) has access to the redemption available in Jesus Christ, and (b) Jesus' blood can be a substitute for our punishment [the concept of propitiation]. It is what God did in Jesus' death and resurrection that demonstrates God's righteousness and patience. God's action in Jesus permitted God to be both just and justifier.

The continued failure of humanity did not prevent God from keeping His promise and achieving His intent. Consider Exodus 32:9, 10 and Numbers 14:11, 12; add to that God's work in the period of the judges and consider God's work in the period of the divided Israelite kingdom. Read John 1:9-13. God was incredibly patient with a wicked humanity to achieve human salvation.

To fail to make salvation a reality in our lives is a rejection of God's patience. Do we not realize God will do as much to preserve our salvation as He did to make our salvation a reality? To quickly reject people is to quickly reject the objective He so patiently sought. Consider Hebrews 6:10 in the context of the situation. Consider Hebrews 8:12. God willingly forgets forgiven sin but remembers the influence for good He has on our lives.

What God did for us in Jesus' death and resurrection does not eliminate our need for obedience. It transforms the motive for obedience. (1) We obey God because (a) we have confidence in what He did in Jesus, and (b) we show our deep appreciation for what He did in Jesus. (2) We do not obey to demonstrate that we deserve God's grace. (a) No man or woman can ever deserve God's grace; we only can appreciate God's grace. (b) We serve God's purposes/ways in the genuine gratitude of love; not in the foolish arrogance that we deserve His forgiveness.

Stress the motive for obedience. Help your students see the difference between obedience motivated by appreciation and obedience that seeks (impossibly) to earn something from God.

We will do more for God in loving appreciation than we would ever do out of any sense of obligation. We do not repay God; we appreciate God.

Love is the most powerful form of motivation known in human commitments. Illustrate the power of a love commitment.

Consider the statements made in some of today's texts:

John 3:16-21. (1) The speaker is Jesus. (2) He likely is speaking to Nicodemus. (3) God sent Jesus as an enormous expression of His love for sinful people. (4) God sent Jesus to save people from their faults, not to judge their faults. (5) The means of escaping divine judgment is to place confidence in God's work in Jesus. (6) There are some who value and are devoted to rebellion to God. Such people will not redirect their lives. The result of a love of evil is a rejection of God's revealing Himself in Jesus Christ. (7) The person who comes to God (a) must want to see self for "who I am" and (b) learn from God "who I can be" by the power of His transformation in Christ.

Stress two things: (1) the incredible love of God; (2) not everyone will be moved to respond to God's love. There are people who love and value the experience of sin.

John 6:35-40. (1) Jesus is the speaker. (2) He spoke to Jewish people who placed their confidence in their religious system. (3) "You must place your confidence in what God is doing in me. I am God's objective in the origins of your religious system. (4) Just as manna sustained your forefathers physically as they crossed their desert, I sustain you spiritually now as you cross your dessert. (5) Confidence in me is the difference between life and death.

Stress the fact that our commitment is not to a system but to God. We are God's people because we are committed to God. God through Christ saves. God's church exists in its human expression because people accept God's salvation. We do not save; we respond to God Who saves. The God Who saves through Jesus Christ is also the God Who uses Jesus Christ to lead us through our desert.

John 11:17-27. (1) Jesus is the speaker. (2) The occasion is Lazarus' death. Jesus is speaking to Martha, the dead man's sister. (3) Lazarus was in the tomb [unenabled] for four days. (4) Martha had confidence in Jesus as effective in the final resurrection. (5) Jesus' power to resurrect was current. (6) Here, the key was Martha's confidence in Jesus and his current power.

*The issue is **not** will Jesus eventually have power in me after I am dead. The issue is does Jesus have power in my life right now.*

Hebrews 11:6. Confidence in God is essential to belonging to God. To come to God a person must (a) believe God exists and (b) God rewards those who seek Him.

A "faithless" Christianity does not exist. One must believe in God to come to God.

The issues for each of us, regardless of our backgrounds and pasts, are these: (1) Do I have confidence in God's commitment to deliver me? (2) Do I trust Jesus to sustain me as I cross my desert? (3) Do I see Jesus as larger than death? (4) Do I earnestly seek God in the conviction that He will reward me even if I die?

Most of the "faith issues" we face in our lives are "now" issues that concern God's role in our lives right now. The struggles of a person from a disadvantaged background and past may be more obvious to some, but the struggles of a person from an ideal background and past are just as real. It always has taken courage to exist as a person of faith.

Remember, no one can come to God without placing his or her confidence in God.

For Thought and Discussion

1. For what is there no substitute?

There is no substitute for faith in God.

2. What two things are basic to confidence in God?
 - a. *God intended Jesus to be our Savior before sin was a human reality.*
 - b. *God patiently worked to rescue us from sin for thousands of years despite human wickedness and failure.*

3. Discuss Romans 3:21-30.

Stress that what God did in Jesus enabled God to use His grace to grant us all our spiritual blessings that expressed themselves in our forgiveness.

4. Discuss why the fact that what God did for us in Jesus' death and resurrection does not eliminate our need to obey God.

Stress that obedience is the only way we can respond to God's promises and show our gratitude for all He has done and continues to do for us.

5. Discuss each of the following scriptures:

a. John 3:16-21

Stress God's design for salvation was to be a means of escaping the judgment of condemnation. Note that not all wish to respond to God's salvation. Responding involves knowing and admitting our need for redirection.

b. John 6:35-40

Note in the discussion that faith must be in God, not the religious system.

c. John 11:17-27

Note in the discussion that the issue is confidence in Jesus' power "now" as well as eventually.

d. Hebrews 11:6

Note the basis of belonging to God requires we have confidence in God.

6. What issues face each person who places confidence in God?

a. *Confidence in God to deliver me.*

b. *Trust in Jesus to sustain me as I cross my wilderness/desert.*

c. *Seeing Jesus as larger than my death.*

d. *Confidence in God's ability to reward me even if my death occurs.*

Lesson Two

To Develop Our Relationship with God there Must Be A Redirection of Self

Scriptures: Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 15

The objective of this lesson: To emphasize the importance of repentance in the human response to God.

The core concept of repentance (repent) is a redirection of self. It is the commitment to change self in fundamental behaviors and habits. It is the acknowledgment, "I am not who I should be" combined with the resolve to yield to God that "I may become who I should be." It is a lifetime commitment. One facet is immediate in the serious redirection of one's life. Another facet is continuing as one spends the rest of his/her life "fine tuning" the change. As the person matures spiritually, he/she constantly adjusts self in motive and behavior as he/she learns more completely what it means to be godly.

Stress two things. (1) Repentance is a person's commitment to change as part of his/her response to God. (2) Repentance is a lifetime commitment, not a one-time act.

Several concepts/understandings are necessary for repentance to occur. (1) The person must admit to himself/herself and others the existence of the need to repent. It is admitted to self to accept the

reality of the personal need. It is admitted to others (a) to acknowledge "I have been wrong" or (b) to produce external accountability. (2) The need to repent rests on an understanding that I must not justify my motives or behavior. Ultimately, I must accept responsibility for my feelings and deeds. Knowing what others did to influence me helps me understand why I did what I did in the past. However, if I am to let God redirect me, I must yield to His redirection by realizing I oversee my "whys" and "what's." The person cannot continue in ungodly motives and behaviors and the ungodliness they produce by blaming (a) others or (b) circumstances. Repentance is an individual commitment to (a) acknowledge motives [understand his/her "whys"] and (b) accept accountability for actions. A commitment to change involves accepting accountability. The objective is **NOT** to punish myself for the past. The objective **IS** to free myself from my past by accepting God's forgiveness in Christ [see Galatians 5:13-17 and Ephesians 4:17-24].

My understanding of my need to change is evident in my attitudes, my behavior, and my relationships. A commitment to repentance is evidenced in the ways I accept responsibility for my motives and behavior. Repentance is not an effort to punish myself for my past, but my embracing freedom from my past. Though difficult, it increasingly becomes joyful. Because God forgives me, I forgive myself. In forgiveness there is freedom.

The core reason for coming to God through Jesus Christ is to **ESCAPE** one's past. Your escape is no more difficult or improbable than was the first century person who came from a family who practiced idolatry for generations. Escape does not occur because you become the ideal person who functions with ideal motives that produce ideal behaviors. Escape occurs because you accept God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ and commit yourself to transformation [see Romans 12:1, 2].

Escape from my flaws is not dependent on perfection, but on my commitment to transformation. I do not rationalize my flaws, but I face and attack my flaws. I want to reflect my God and my Lord Jesus Christ in my life.

However, for such escape to occur one must repent. God cannot help the person who is certain he/she does not need help. We come to God to practice godliness, not to evaluate others. God rescues people through Christ. We as Christians point people to God. It is by seeking to behave and have the relationships of a godly person that we help others see the value of belonging to God.

I am so busy transforming myself in Christ that I do not have time or energy to pass eternal judgment on others. I exist to encourage others in their struggles to repent. I do not exist to condemn others who are committed to repentance.

The core of John's message as he prepared the Jewish people for Jesus' ministry and message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:12). He told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to him for baptism that they were poisonous snakes who needed to produce the fruit of repentance. They came to John to submit to a correct act for an incorrect reason. Though they were religious leaders, they needed to repent.

It is spiritually significant that the core of John's message and mission involved people's repentance. The manifestation of God's kingdom would not benefit the Jewish people (who were quite religious) unless they acknowledged their need to repent.

The early emphasis in Jesus' message was on repentance. Matthew 4:17 states Jesus began his preaching by declaring, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Responding to the appearance of the kingdom of heaven required repentance.

It is equally significant that the core of Jesus' message stressed repentance. It must not be "assumed" that we and others understand the need to repent.

The gospel of Luke records great emphasis on the need to repent including (a) Jesus ministry was to call sinners to repentance [Luke 5:31, 32]; (b) gentile cities would have repented had they seen Jesus' miracles performed in Jewish cities [Luke 10:13]; (c) repentance is necessary to escape God's wrath [Luke 13:1-5]; (d) there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who do not need to repent [Luke 15:7]; (e) people who refuse to listen to God will not repent [Luke 16:27-31]; and (f) unending repentance must be met with unending forgiveness [Luke 17:1-4].

Place emphasis on the ways Luke stressed the importance of repentance, from it being central to Jesus' mission, to its being an essential part of human response to God, to heaven's response to human repentance, to God's unending kindness to us resulting in our unending willingness to forgive. Repentance has many facets. It is not one dimensional.

Repentance is more than sorrow or regret. The right kind of sorrow or regret produces repentance. Consider Romans 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10. When a person (a) realizes what God did for us in Jesus' death and resurrection and (b) understands how his/her sinfulness hurts the kind, sacrificing God, he/she (c) is sorry for hurting God Who does not deserve the hurt. It is that kind of regretful sorrow that can result in repentance. It is that type of repentance that leads to salvation.

Stress a person can be sorry without repenting. Sorrow does not require action. Repentance requires us to act. The right kind of sorrow leads to repentance, not is repentance.

Christianity is a commitment to personal change. That commitment expresses itself in repentance. Repentance's direction and goal is determined by God's holiness. The more is learned about God's holiness, the more devoted the person becomes to God's character. The objective of the penitent is to reflect God's influence in his/her life. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 5:13-16.

Stress the essence of Christianity is a commitment to personal change by listening to God through Jesus Christ. The Christian learns about God's nature to devote himself/herself to God's values.

We do not repent to bring praise to ourselves. We repent to bring praise to God.

We change (1) because God exists and (2) because God oversees our lives.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is the core concept of repentance?

It is a redirection of self.

2. What is the commitment of repentance?

Repentance's commitment is to change self in fundamental behaviors and habits.

3. What is the acknowledgment of repentance?

It is to acknowledge "I am not who I should be."

4. What is the resolve of repentance?

It is to yield to God in "becoming who I should be."

5. Explain why repentance is a lifetime commitment.

As spiritual growth occurs, the need to repent grows. As one better understands God's holy values, he/she better understands how evil expresses itself in his/her life.

6. What does the person have to admit to himself/herself?

"I need to repent."

7. What is the importance of admitting need to self?

That admission allows me to accept reality about myself.

8. What is the importance of admitting need to others?

I do that to (1) acknowledge my error or (2) to produce external accountability.

9. Repentance is the person's commitment to do what two things?

a. *Acknowledge his/her motives.*

b. *Accept accountability for his/her actions.*

10. What is NOT the objective of repentance?

The objective is not the punishment of self for past failures.

11. What IS the objective of repentance?

The objective is to free myself from my past by accepting God's forgiveness expressed in Jesus Christ.

12. What is the core reason for coming to God through Jesus Christ?

It is to escape one's past.

13. Explain why escape does and does not occur.

Escape occurs because we accept God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ and commit ourselves to transformation. It does not occur because we become the ideal person with ideal motives and ideal behavior.

14. To what kind of person can God not provide help?

He cannot provide help to the person who refuses to acknowledge the need for help.

15. How did the gospel of Luke stress repentance?

- a. *By emphasizing its role in Jesus' ministry.*
- b. *By emphasizing how gentiles would have reacted to Jesus' miracles.*
- c. *By stressing it allows a person to escape divine wrath.*
- d. *By stressing its impact on heaven.*
- e. *By stressing its role in listening to God.*
- f. *By stressing its role in human willingness to forgive.*

16. Use Romans 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10 to illustrate repentance is more than sorrow.

Emphasize repentance produces action.

17. Why does a person repent?

He/she is committed to allowing God's holiness to change him/her personally.

Lesson Three
To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Making A Commitment
Scriptures: Galatians 3:23-29

The objective of this lesson: to stress that (a) faith in Jesus as the Christ, as the fulfillment to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, (b) repentance of life's focus and sinful acts, and (c) baptism (immersion) are of equal importance in coming to God through Jesus Christ. To stress that these comprise a response to God from a person making a life of commitment to God and His purposes.

In all ventures, the moment of commitment must come. A person must become a member of the club (you can be a visitor for only so long); a person must decide to make the investment (you can seek advice for only so long); a person must vow, "I do," to another person (dating was not designed to last a lifetime). The moment of commitment is bigger than membership; bigger than the investment of time or money; bigger than legal sex; bigger than living with someone. Commitment says, "This is a rightful, intentional part of the definition of who I am and what my life is about." The commitment to Christian existence is just that--a commitment to an existence. That commitment is the core definition of who I am, what my life is about, what my values are, and what principles rule my relationships.

Stress the response to God is one of commitment to God. One can come to God because of what God accomplished through Jesus Christ. To refresh your understanding of the importance of what God accomplished through Jesus' death and resurrection, read Romans 3:21-30. While the twentieth and twenty-first century's common question regarding baptism centered in immersion, the common first century question was, "Is Jesus the Christ (Christ, Greek language), the Messiah (Messiah, Hebrew

language) that fulfills God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3?" First Century Jewish people had difficulty accepting that the Messiah would suffer (see Acts 2:23, 24). The gentile convert had difficulty understanding faith in Jesus as the Christ or Messiah made them heirs of Abraham (see Galatians 3:29; Romans 4:11-13).

Consider the following concept.

FAITH + REPENTANCE + BAPTISM IS THE CORE OF CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT.

The core commitment of the Christian is made by responding to God in all three ways. This commitment is both a personal and public (visual) declaration.

Someone might ask, "Which of these is the most important?" My answer would be none of them. Faith in God which produced Jesus the Christ is spiritually meaningless unless it produces repentance and baptism. Repentance of a life focus and actions which rebelled against God and His values is spiritually meaningless if that repentance is not a product of faith in God which produces baptism into Christ. Baptism is a meaningless burial in water if it is not a product of faith in God's works in Jesus Christ and a decision to repent.

Stress the New Testament emphasizes all three, not any one of them.

It is not a formula. It is not a "sequence" of "correct" actions and affirmations. It is a commitment. It is a commitment to something eternal, bigger than a godless existence.

The tendency of many is to stress that baptism is some type of magical act that makes a person a Christian in God's eyes because someone else is concerned. Faith-repentance can (a) be assumed or (b) supplied by the anxious person or people. Thus, if the "formula" or "correct sequence" occurs, salvation is certain to result.

Can someone else make this commitment for me? No. It is a personal commitment. Someone else may point me in the correct direction and encourage me. However, when the moment of commitment comes, the person must make it for himself/herself.

It is essential for the convert and those anxious for him/her to understand salvation is the result of the person seeking God through faith-repentance-baptism.

Will the moment of commitment be the same for all people? No. For some, faith-repentance-baptism occurs quickly. For others, it is a time-sensitive process. Faith may be a developing process, or repentance may be a developing process, or the need for immersion may be a developing process. For such people, rushing them is not helpful. Teaching them is helpful. They need time to commit, and Christians need to give them time. These people must not act based on others' anxiety for them but based on their faith in God.

It is important for all Christians to understand (a) not all people want salvation [John 3:16-21] and (b) it is a time process for some who come to God [consider Acts 6:7 by noting the response of many priests].

It is easy for those who understand the importance of coming to God to seek to make coming to God an impersonal process rather than a personal commitment.

Must there be a comprehension of the commitment? Certainly. The person must know what he/she is doing. Someone else does not "commit" for a person. The person surrenders himself/herself in yielding to God's purpose in Christ through his/her life. (It is my conviction that a significant reason for many being converted to a religious institution while having little or no dedication to the Jesus Christ the Savior is directly related to this fact: they never committed to the resurrected Jesus. Such people often feel little or no loyalty to Jesus because they made no commitment to Jesus. They feel loyalty to the church [as in their congregation]. They are more likely to ask, "What is the congregation's position?" than, "What is Jesus' teaching?")

Stress that the person must understand (a) the basic nature of the commitment and (b) that he/she [the convert] is making a commitment.

CONSIDER THESE STATEMENTS ON IMMERSION: (The word, "baptize," was a common word in the Greek language. It was used for a submersion in water, like the sinking of a ship. No biblically recorded objection to immersion or questioning of the religious meaning of the act is recorded. Though some inadequately understood the significance of baptism, it was not a biblically contested theological idea or religious practice.)

The basic nature of baptism [an immersion] must be understood.

To a Jewish audience: Acts 2:38 [see Acts 2:9-12]. (1) Believers who accepted as fact they were responsible for crucifying God's Lord and Christ asked Peter what they should do. (2) Peter said there was a solution produced by divine forgiveness. (3) To activate the solution, those who accepted accountability for participating in Jesus' crucifixion were told to do two things. (a) The first was to repent. (b) The second was to be baptized. (4) A willingness to allow faith to express itself in repentance and baptism produced two results: (a) forgiveness of sins and (b) receiving as a gift the Holy Spirit.

Though "God's chosen people" because they were descendants of Abraham through Isaac, Jews needed to escape sin (even those who contributed to Jesus' crucifixion) through a faith-filled, penitent baptism.

To [likely] a proselyte: Acts 8:36-39. (1) The preaching of Jesus began with Isaiah 53:8 and included the need to be baptized. (a) The eunuch saw the water in the uninhabited area and (b) asked to be baptized. (2) The eunuch ordered the chariot to stop. They both entered the water prior to baptism. Following baptism, (a) they both left the water, (b) Philip was Spirit directed elsewhere immediately, and (c) the eunuch continued his trip rejoicing.

Though he was an important man who was wealthy enough to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and purchase a handwritten copy of Isaiah, he would be limited in what he could do in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 23:1-6). Try to help your students develop a sense of history--Philip could begin in Isaiah and teach about the Christ because Jesus Christ was the unfolding plan of God. A part of responding to the Christ involved baptism (immersion).

To [likely] gentile Christians who were previously baptized: Galatians 3:26-29. (1) The emphasis is on faith in Jesus Christ and baptism. (2) Faith in God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) led them to baptism. (3) The combination of faith in God's promise to Abraham [the sending of one who would be everyone's Messiah] with the understanding that Jesus was that Messiah [the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham] permitted a person (a) to enter Jesus Christ and (b) be clothed with Christ [just as Jesus assumed human sin in his death (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 1 Corinthians 15:3), they assumed his righteous in their faith-baptism commitment to Jesus]. (3) Being in Christ was what mattered to God. (4) Belonging to Christ was the basis of being Abraham's descendant and being inheritors of God's promise to Abraham. Being in Christ made them [gentile converts] a part of God's chosen people.

Often the Jews were so exclusionary in approaching God that they did not allow gentiles access to God (unless the gentile demonstrated interest in or potential for conversion to Judaism) [see Matthew 23:15]. The concept of faith in Jesus Christ granting a gentile access to God (a) was opposed by Jews who rejected Jesus and (b) often made gentile converts feel like (1) second class converts or (2) spiritually inferior. Paul said access to God was generated by having Abraham's faith, not his physical lineage.

The combination of faith in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, repentance of sin, and baptism into Christ makes one unquestionably a part of God's chosen people.

Access to God is biblically generated by approaching God with a combination of faith in Jesus Christ, repentance of sins, and baptism (immersion) into Jesus Christ.

For Thought and Discussion

1. In all ventures, what must come?

The moment of commitment must come.

2. Christian commitment is the core definition of what?

It is a core definition of "who I am," "what my life is about," "what my values are," and "what principles rule my relationships."

3. Of faith, repentance, and baptism, which is the most important?

Each is equally important in seeking God.

4. Christian commitment is not what two things?

it is not a formula, not a sequence of correct actions and affirmations.

5. It is what?

It is a commitment to something eternal, something that is bigger than a godless existence.

6. In Acts 2:38, what two things activated the solution of divine forgiveness?

Repentance and baptism were the two things.

7. In Acts 8:36-39, who asked for baptism?

The eunuch asked for baptism. It was his inquiry, not Philip's insistence.

8. In Galatians 3:26-29, what two things did faith in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God's promise and baptism produce?

They produced an entrance into Jesus Christ and a clothing of the convert with Jesus Christ.

9. What unquestionably makes a person a part of God's chosen people?

A faith-repentance-baptism seeking of God through Jesus Christ makes one unquestionably a part of God's chosen people.

Lesson Four

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must have the attitude of men such as Abraham Scriptures: Genesis 12:10-20; 17:1-5; Joshua 24:2, 3

In the rest of our study for this quarter, we will examine the lives of some people useful to God in the Old Testament. Next quarter we will examine the lives of some people useful to God in the New Testament. In both studies your attention is called to this fact: God often used people who had major flaws to accomplish His purposes.

Stress to your students that the rest of this quarter will focus on (1) God's blessings to anyone. (2) His ability to use anyone is NOT dependent on the person's past or the person's present flaws but DOES depend on the person's willingness to trust God. Trust is dependence on Him and His guidance in one's life.

The fact that God could and can use people with significant flaws to achieve His purposes emphasizes several things. (1) It emphasizes the power is in God, not people. (2) The fundamental issue is not the past of the person, but the person's willingness to grow in God. (3) A person who repents should not be measured by the flaws of his/her past, but by the demonstration of his/her faith in God in serving God's purposes.

Stress that usefulness to God is not dependent on human flaws but on God's power and adequacy. Dependence on God can change us and redirect our lives.

There is no individual in scripture (aside from God and Jesus) spoken of more frequently than Abraham. A multitude of nations, including Israel, trace or traced their origin to Abraham. The promise

from God that resulted in Jesus Christ was given to Abraham. The nation from whom the Messiah came descended from Abraham. The greatest gift God gave a sinful world began with Abraham's faith.

Stress the biblical emphasis on Abraham's faith. Perhaps an illustration of Abraham's greatness is seen in the fact that his faith continues to be the standard for human faith. Even Christians may (perhaps) equal Abraham's faith, but never surpass it.

Yet, God was able to use Abraham, (1) not because Abraham was without flaws from his beginning, but (2) because Abraham was willing to become a man who trusted God. It was not "who he was at the beginning" that was remarkable, but "who he became because of his faith in God" that is remarkable. As obedient as Abraham was, scripture does not emphasize his obedience. Scripture emphasizes his faith. He was a man of great obedience to God because he was a man who greatly trusted God.

Abraham's usefulness to God did not develop because Abraham was humanly "perfect."

Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac (Joshua 24:2, 3).

The point Joshua made to Israel when he spoke these words was, "You can worship and follow any idol you choose (which idol you choose will be insignificant). However, my family will worship the God who gave us this land." The observation called to your attention is this: Abraham's father, Terah, served idols. As Abraham grew up, he grew up in an idol worshipping-serving household. It is possible that Abraham did not know God, did not serve God, and did not follow God prior to receiving God's call. Can you imagine listening to and believing in God's call when you first met God?

Joshua urged the Israelite people to make an unconditional commitment to God. In doing so he observed the patriarch Abraham came from an idolatrous origin. Since idols do not represent a living god, the issue was not which idol one worshipped. The issue was did the person worship and serve God.

The request Abraham received from God in Haran after his father's death was anything but small. Leaving his country, his relatives, and his father's family to go to an undisclosed destination was enormous! He was leaving the people who would care for him and his immediate family in situations of distress--these people were his insurance policy, his material security! God's venture required enormous courage and confidence!

Stress the enormous courage it took to yield to God's directions. Perhaps relate it to situations today when we hesitate to follow God's guidance.

After showing great courage in leaving, Abraham encountered a severe famine in Canaan. To solve the problems brought by the famine, he went to Egypt. Before entering Egypt, Abraham asked his beautiful wife Sarah (Sarai), to tell the Egyptians she was his sister. He feared the Egyptians would kill him to marry his wife. Though she was his half-sister as well as his wife (Genesis 20:12), Abraham in this situation thought only of himself and his life.

Stress after leaving Haran, in a perceived crisis moment, Abraham allowed concern for self to determine his actions.

Abraham's confidence in God, as great as it was, needed to grow. It grew beyond selfishness (consider his willingness to offer Isaac in Genesis 22), but in this situation his confidence in God competed with his selfishness. The man of great faith in God also had moments of selfish concern.

Note crisis moments that test commitment can come after remarkable acts of commitment. Abraham became quite self-centered after his remarkable departure from Haran.

Please note these things: (1) Weakness can grow to strength. (2) At the same moment, a person is capable of doubt and confidence. (3) The objective is to diminish the doubt and increase the confidence. (4) The fact that a person has a shaky beginning does not mean the person is not capable of yielding to and encouraging great spirituality.

Deep spirituality is the result of continued growth over a long period of time.

It is easy to conclude that a person is born to great spirituality. It is easy to conclude that the potential for great spirituality does not exist in you. It is easy to conclude there are too many difficulties in your life for you to become a deeply spiritual person of great commitment.

Spiritual development is dependent on (1) trust in God and (2) a commitment to continued spiritual development, not on one's past.

The spirituality of commitment to God is a matter of trust, not of birth, is a matter of confidence, not of convenience. The issue is not your obstacles. The issue is your ability to place your confidence in God.

Stress that we need to keep the focus of the issue where it belongs, not on our anxieties. Keeping the true issue properly focused is a part of having faith.

God did not look at Abraham's background and flaws. He looked at Abraham's spiritual potential. God gave Abraham opportunity to trust. God also looks at your potential, not your past or your flaws. He, too, will grant you opportunity to trust. As with Abraham, your opportunities will be the product of your real-life experiences.

Be sensitive to your opportunities to trust and place your confidence in God as you live your life.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What will be the focus of our study for the rest of this quarter?

The focus will be on the lives of some people who were useful to God despite problems.

2. Name 3 things emphasized by the fact God can use flawed people to achieve His purposes.
 - a. *The power is in God, not people.*

- b. *The fundamental issue is not in a person's past, but his/her willingness to grow in God.*
 - c. *The person who repents should not be measured by the flaws of his/her past, but by a demonstration of his/her faith in God as he/she serves God's purposes.*
3. Why was God able to use Abraham?
 - a. *God did not use Abraham because he was a person without flaws.*
 - b. *God used Abraham because he was willing to become a person who trusted God.*
 4. What was Joshua's point when he spoke Joshua 24:2, 3 to Israel?

You can worship any idol (god) you choose, but my family will worship God Who gave us this land.

5. What observation is called to your attention?

Abraham's father, Terah, served idols.

6. What was enormous about God's request of Abraham after his father died?

He was asked to leave his "emergency security" to follow God's guidance.

7. Regarding the incident concerning his wife, what did Abraham's confidence in God need?

It needed to grow.

8. What 4 things were you asked to note about Abraham's confidence in God?

- a. *Weakness can grow to strength.*
- b. *At the same moment, a person is capable of doubt and confidence.*
- c. *The objective is to decrease doubt and increase confidence.*
- d. *The fact that a person has a shaky beginning does not mean he/she is incapable of yielding to and encouraging great spirituality.*

9. The spirituality of commitment to God is what?

- a. *It is a matter of trust, not of birth.*
- b. *It is a matter of confidence, not of convenience.*

Lesson Five

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Have the Attitude of Sarah: The Fixer

Scriptures: Genesis 16; 17:1-21; 21:1-14

The objective of this lesson: God can use us even when we have displayed horrible human weakness.

People are impatient. What we want, we want now. When we want a change that we regard to be an improvement, that change cannot happen fast enough.

Stress the impatience when humans want what they want, and they want it right now.

God had promised Abraham great promises (Genesis 12:3). (1) God would make him a great nation, a blessed man with a great name. (2) God would protect him. (3) God would make him a nation, and that nation would be the source of a world blessing.

Stress the huge promises God made to Abraham. Those were enormous promises if made to anyone. They were huge when you consider they were made to a childless man.

There was a problem! Abraham was 75, his wife (Sarah) was 10 years younger, and they had no children. If Abraham had no child (son), there could be no nation! For there to be a nation of descendants who were a source of world blessing, the couple must have a child.

The critical key to God keeping His promise to Abraham and Sarah was their having a child, preferably a son.

God continued to promise (Genesis 13:14-18). Abraham's descendants would own and live in the land through which he wandered. His descendants would be too many to count. Yet, Abraham still had no children.

God was definite, relentless, and determined when He promised (just as He is to you about the forgiveness of sins). His promise was not "just a passing statement easily forgotten." It was a repeated promise.

God specifically promised a concerned Abraham a son (Genesis 15:1-5). Abraham believed God's promise, and his faith in God's promise of a son was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness (Genesis 15:6) years before Sarah was pregnant.

This promise was believed by Abraham and by Sarah! Never was their doubt based on an "if," but on a "how." They each proposed a solution about the "how."

Too much time had passed! Neither Abraham nor Sarah were getting any younger! Sarah had no children, and there was neither prospect of nor anticipation of a child in her future. Sarah had grown accustomed to being barren--so accustomed to that condition she expected to be childless the rest of her life. To her it was obvious that God needed some help to keep His promise to make her husband the beginning of a nation. Before there could be many, there had to be one.

As time passed, it increasingly became an act that was 100% God and 0% them. They (as we) were not comfortable with (1) not knowing how and (2) being totally dependent on God's action, which exceeded their comprehension. The more it became humanly impossible, the more they wanted to provide a solution.

She was more than willing to provide God the help He obviously needed! Her solution was a known and practiced solution in her day. She was caring for the problem as many of her day cared for it. [Remember Rachel (Genesis 30:1-8) and Leah (Genesis 30:9-13).] A female servant could be the wife's surrogate. The child produced by the servant and the husband of the marriage would be considered the heir of the married couple, the legally recognized child of the married couple. Do not forget three things. (1) Human population was sparse then in comparison to now. (2) Heirs were extremely

important for the continuation of the family. (3) The most common form of inheritance was in the form of land and livestock. Heirs were critical to every family's future!

Sarah believed God could provide the nation. She was sure God needed help in providing the son. Emphasize the solution she provided was an accepted solution in her time. Also emphasize her solution "made sense" to her (and likely Abraham since he agreed). She (like us) was helping God out with something that "had Him stuck" in "keeping His promise." Caution: do not forget that this was God's specific promise, not a human deduction.

Sarah had an Egyptian servant who was young enough to have a child. Sarah was 75 at this time--it had been 10 years since Abraham, Sarah, and Lot left Haran at God's directive, and Abraham and Sarah still had no child. Sarah asked Abraham to have a child by her Egyptian servant, Hagar. Abraham honored Sarah's request (perhaps thought it a good idea). As soon as Hagar conceived by Abraham, Hagar lost respect for Sarah. She had Abraham's child, not Sarah! Tension between the two developed and increased. Hagar had no respect for Sarah, Sarah held Abraham responsible for the situation, and Abraham is caught in the middle.

Explain Sarah's solution. Use Rachel and Leah to verify this type of approach was used.

Abraham finally gave Sarah permission to treat the mother of his child as Sarah wished. The tension must have been severe! Sarah was so harsh with Hagar that Hagar fled. The Lord's angel (1) instructed Hagar to return and submit to Sarah [indicating Hagar was rebellious?], (2) named the child to be born declaring the baby would be a son, and (3) and promised this son, too, would have too many descendants to count. Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born.

When Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, Hagar had rights. She became Abraham's charge rather than Sarah's slave. Sarah's power over Hagar was limited. Sarah likely could not physically abuse her, sell her, or insist that she leave. What occurred had to occur with Abraham's permission. Sarah probably made Abraham so miserable that he gave Sarah permission to do as she wished with Hagar. The issue between Ishmael and Isaac likely began with the tension between their mothers.

Over a decade later (Ishmael was in his early teens) [Genesis 17], God promised Abraham he would have a son from Sarah within a year. God gave Abraham circumcision as a symbol of the agreement between them. Abraham indicated his confidence in God's covenant by circumcising himself, Ishmael, and all his male servants immediately.

At the time of this promise Sarah was not pregnant and had no reason to think she would be pregnant. Circumcision was given to Abraham in anticipation of Isaac's birth and the coming nation.

In a year, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 21:1-5). Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. Isaac was weaned, Abraham had a feast to honor Isaac's growth event, and Sarah saw Ishmael acting inappropriately. Sarah insisted that Abraham not allow Ishmael to continue in the family. [Remember, Ishmael is Abraham's son and the first born--but not the promised child.] Reluctantly, with God's encouragement, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. Sarah's earlier "solution" resulted in heartbreak for Abraham. Though Sarah resented Hagar and Ishmael, Abraham loved Ishmael. Sending him away caused Abraham great grief (Genesis 21:11)!

Things to note. (1) Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn, and was recognized as such. There is more involved than Sarah not liking Hagar and Ishmael. Ishmael's departure would solve a complex situation. (2) Abraham's heartbreak over sending his son away was real. (3) God's assurance was critical to Abraham sending Ishmael away. (4) This is an excellent example of a human solution to a divine intent becoming a problem rather than a solution.

How often our "solutions" given in God's behalf result in tragedy! How often our "solutions" for God express our lack of confidence in God rather than our confidence in God! How often our "solutions" result in the needless hurt of others!

Never forget that God can take care of Himself! We do not have to take care of His interests or intents! We serve God; we do not direct God!

For Thought and Discussion

1. Discuss the impatience of people.

The discussion should include the desire of people to have improvements immediately.

2. Discuss the greatness of God's promises to Abraham.

The discussion should include an awareness of promising a coming nation to a childless man.

3. What was the problem?

The problem: an old couple who had no child were promised descendants.

4. What did God specifically promise as concerned Abraham?

The child would come through him.

5. When was Abraham considered by God to be a righteous man?

He was a righteous man when he believed God's promise.

6. What did Sarah feel she needed to do for God? Why?

She felt the need to help God provide a child. This would enable God to keep the promise to give Abraham a nation.

7. State Sarah's solution.

(Expand on this as you think appropriate.) She would have a child through Hagar, her Egyptian servant, and the child would be considered Sarah's.)

8. What developed and increased?

Tension developed and increased.

9. What did Abraham finally do?

He gave Sarah permission to treat Hagar as she wished.

10. What did Sarah do?

She was harsh with Hagar. (The form of Sarah's harshness is not given.)

11. What did Hagar do?

Hagar fled.

12. What did the angel say to Hagar?

- a. *Return to Sarah and submit to her.*
- b. *You will have a son--name him Ishmael.*
- c. *He, also, will have many descendants.*

13. What happened when Isaac was born?

When Isaac was weaned, Abraham gave a feast. At that feast Sarah thought Ishmael acted inappropriately.

14. Often our solutions given to help God in ways He has not requested our involvement result in what?

Such actions often result in tragedy.

Lesson Six

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Learn from Men like Jacob: The Deceiver

Scriptures: Genesis 25:27-34; 27; 30:27-43; 47:9

The objective of this lesson: To stress the fact that we can be useful to God's purposes when the principle thing we see as we review our lives is the consequences of turmoil.

At times, we must learn the hard way--when consequences of experience are forced to demonstrate the folly of desires. That is why "hindsight" is so much more accurate than a desire to shape "our future." It is amazing what the experience of 65 years of living can do in evaluating our desires when we were 20 years old. This is not a reference to pessimism of age trumping the optimism of youth. It is a reference to the knowledge of outcomes trumping the folly of unwise desires. Often what we want is not what we need.

What can seem so important to us when we are young adults can seem so foolish when we are old enough to look back and view our lives with the "sight" of experience. Personalize these lessons with your own personal experience. Give your students opportunity to share the folly of inexperience seen through the later eyes of experience.

I am impressed with this: what Jacob desired at the beginning of his adult life and his evaluation of his past as an old man were in stark contrast. To me it is the contrast between "I want it all, and I want it now!" and the later realization of all the damage done by that attitude. What seemed an excellent idea at first resulted in a troubled life. Yet, God used Jacob powerfully!

What was viewed by Jacob as opportunity in early adult life was understood to be the root of turmoil in later life. Yet, with all the misery of his turmoil, God was able to use him in powerful ways. There are two keys to being useful to God's purposes: (1) never becoming too old to repent; (2) never becoming too old to learn.

Esau and Jacob were twins (Genesis 25:24). Even before birth, the two struggled with each other to the extent that Rebekah asked God to explain the situation. To her it was revealed that (a) each child was the source of a nation, and that (b) the older would be the servant to the younger [which was not at all typical of her time].

Jacob and Esau were in conflict even before birth. It is commonly a challenge for people who (1) are aggressive and (2) are quite different to be in conflict. That is true of Christians today. In the Church of Christ of the 20th and 21st centuries, there are few things as "bad" as being wrong. Consider Romans 14--what we struggle to recognize is of no problem to God, even when we reach different conclusions.

When they were grown, men by our standards, Jacob took advantage of Esau. Though they were twins, they were quite different. Esau returned from hunting extremely hungry. Jacob was cooking. Esau wanted some of the food Jacob prepared, and Jacob was willing for him to have the food if Esau would sell his birthright for the food.

Jacob was greedy, and Esau was foolish (frivolous). Both were self-centered, but in quite different ways. Neither would have appreciated that observation.

Two things must be considered. (a) Food preparation was a long process--there were no "fast food" venues, or "pre-prepared food," or quickly available snacks as are common today. (b) The birthright was valuable. For example, if there were four sons, the inheritance would be divided into five parts with two parts going to the oldest son as his birthright because he was the first son to be born. Though Jacob and Esau were twins, Esau was born first. The birthright was his, not Jacob's. Jacob's request was not equal, nor was it a small request! Esau was foolish, and Jacob was greedy.

Esau exaggerated his situation. Jacob saw selfish opportunity in his brother's frivolousness. Esau saw only the desires of the moment. Jacob saw the future at the expense of the needs of his brother.

Typically, the birthright also had family leadership implications. Though God said the older would serve the younger before their birth occurred (see Genesis 25:23 and Romans 9:10-13), neither evil nor greed had to occur for God's purposes to be accomplished through Jacob.

Never conclude that something happened unrighteous because it could not happen any other way. God does not have to resort to evil to keep His promise though evil cannot keep Him from keeping His promise.

Usually the father conveyed the birthright to the oldest son as he pronounced the family blessing near the time of the father's death. Isaac, in his anxiety seemingly produced by the combination of being elderly and blind, told Esau to prepare to receive the blessing. Rebekah overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau and urged Jacob to prepare to deceive his father. When Jacob was fearful of the consequences of an attempt to deceive Isaac, Rebekah assured him he would endure no consequences.

This would seem to indicate Esau was not serious in selling his birthright. He did not tell his father, "What you intend should be given to Jacob." Everyone in the family understood the significance of what Isaac intended to do.

As the result of all aspects of the deception, Jacob succeeded in his deception. Isaac pronounced prosperity on Jacob and leadership over nations and in the family. When Esau came to Isaac shortly, the deception was evident. Isaac trembled violently, and Esau was in anguish. Esau determined in himself he would kill Jacob when Isaac died. Rebekah decided the best way for her to protect Jacob was to send him back to her family to acquire a wife, which she did.

The consequences of Jacob's act included Isaac's immediate reaction and Esau's intent when Isaac died.

When Jacob worked for Laban [Rebekah's brother] for seven years for Rachel to become his wife, Laban deceived Jacob by giving him Leah. Jacob, because of that deception, endured years of rivalry between Rachel and Leah.

The consequences in Jacob's life continued to occur. (In our lives and mistakes, be certain to distinguish between consequences for an evil decision and forgiveness for an evil decision. Because forgiveness has occurred does not mean consequences are canceled. Also distinguish between temptation and sin.)

Jacob then deceived Laban regarding Laban's sheep and goats. The result eventually was animosity between Jacob and Laban's sons (see Genesis 31:1). He also noted a change in Laban's attitude toward him (Genesis 31:2). The result was Jacob's failed attempt to move his family and livestock back home secretly.

When one does not learn that deception produces consequences, he or she will continue to drink from the trough of deception.

Later Jacob's own sons deceived him into believing his favorite son, Joseph, was dead (see Genesis 37). The man, who as a young man wanted it all quickly, acquired instead an extremely troubled life. When presented to Pharaoh as an old man, Jacob said, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning" (Genesis 47:9).

The consequences of deception continued. The deceiver again was deceived.

Yet, in all this, God found Jacob useful. Though Jacob repeatedly learned "the hard way," he learned. Though he could have been much more useful to God than he was, his life still served God's purposes.

At times it takes a lot to teach us. If you can, get your students to think about (even share if they so desire) things they had to learn the hard way.

Never conclude your mistakes are too huge for you to be useful to God's purposes. Even if you must learn "the hard way," learn! Do not fear learning, understanding, and repenting. The issue in your life is not how useful to God you could have been, but how useful to God are you willing to be right now. Serve God! Let the mistakes of your past be the wisdom of your today! Let the purposes of God be benefited by your existence!

Never allow your mistakes to be bigger than the compassion of your forgiving God. Do not have your students minimize their mistakes, but to have faith that God will accept repentance and extend forgiveness. Do not justify evil behavior by concluding God uses your evil for good purposes. Consider Romans 9:14-33.

For Thought and Discussion

1. At times, we must learn how? What is that?

At times we must learn the hard way. That is learning through the consequences of experience instead of the warnings of wisdom.

2. Why is "hindsight" more accurate than looking into our future?

"Hindsight" sees through both the eyes of experience and the eyes of consequence.

3. What Jacob desired as his adult life began and his evaluation of his life as an old man were what?

They were in stark contrast.

4. Before birth Esau and Jacob struggled. What did God tell Rebekah about them?

- a. *Each child was the source of a nation.*
- b. *The older child would serve the younger child.*

5. Explain how Jacob took advantage of Esau.

Tell the story of Esau's extreme hunger when he returned from hunting, and Jacob's taking advantage of Esau's situation.

6. Explain how Jacob deceived Isaac.

Tell of the "deal" Jacob offered Esau.

7. Explain how Jacob deceived Laban regarding Laban's live stock.

He manipulated the breeding of the livestock to his advantage. Note that both Laban (Genesis 30:35, 36) and Jacob (Genesis 30:37-43) sought to manipulate the other to each one's own advantage. This is not a recommendation of their efforts but a statement of what they did.

8. Talk about some of the ways Jacob was deceived.

Consider the incident of Leah being substituted for Rachel, the incidents of Rachel and Leah's rivalry, the manipulation of livestock, the incident of Dinah (Genesis 34), and the incident of Joseph.

9. What is not the issue in a person's life today?

The issue is not how useful to God you could have been had you lived your life differently.

10. What is the issue in a person's life today?

The issue is are you willing to be useful to God right now.

Lesson Seven

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Learned from Joseph: The Arrogance of Youth Distorts Perspective

Scriptures: Genesis 37, 39, 40, 41, 50:15-21

The objective of this lesson: to demonstrate the blessings of faith in God can occur after the mistakes of youth.

Seldom will we encounter a righteous person who does not wish he or she could change something done in his or her past. People who reflect on their past often are people who wish they could change some things about their past. It is not unusual to hear a person of the experience produced by years of living say of a younger adult with little experience, "I wish he (she) would grow up!" In the absence of experience there is often the folly of arrogance.

Thoughtful people often reflect on their past mistakes. Ask your students to illustrate that truth.

Joseph as an adult was a righteous person who had an incredible trust in God and His purposes. However, as a teenager he had a sense of privilege and self-importance that specialized in offending people. When he was seventeen, he was with the sons of Bilah (Dan and Naphtali) and the sons of Zilpah (Gad and Asher) [see Genesis 35:24, 25] pasturing Jacob's flocks. Though he was too young to be responsible for the flock, he made "a bad report" concerning his brothers. He informed his father of his older half-brother's faults rather than seeking to help them by speaking to them. He deliberately attempted to get these half- brothers in trouble.

Joseph offers a fascinating contrast between a teenager with a bad attitude and an adult who was led by faith in God even when he encountered horrible circumstances.

Joseph's arrogance is seen in his reporting to his father rather than going to his brothers. Joseph seemed more concerned about making himself look good to his Dad instead of helping his brothers be better in their work.

His father loved Joseph more than his ten other brothers. He showed Joseph favoritism. The favoritism of the father was not ignored by all the half-brothers. The results where it stirred these men's hatred for Joseph, and they refused to speak to him peacefully.

Jacob's reaction to Joseph illustrates how complex Jacob's situation was and had been. Jacob's reaction to Joseph was the result of Joseph being born late in his life as the oldest son of the only woman he wanted for a wife.

The situation intensified when Joseph had dreams. The first dream implied he would reign over his brothers. He delighted in telling his brothers the dream (it was too good to keep to himself). In this way, Joseph intensified his brothers' resentment. "Do you (Joseph) actually think you will rule over us (the brothers)?"

Joseph's dreams made a bad situation worse. As a teacher, do not forget the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3 which was also given to Isaac (Genesis 17:21; 21:12; 25:21-26) which was also given to Jacob (Genesis 28:11-15). The passing of God's promise from generation to generation was a significant matter to the half-brothers. Anything indicating Joseph had an advantage in the matter of the promise would have been especially irritating to the half-brothers. The thoughts of young, arrogant Joseph ruling over them stirred their hatred for Joseph. There was much more involved in their ill will for Joseph than the arrogance of a teenager.

The second dream implied his mother and father would bow to him as well. When he told his father **and** his brothers this dream, his father rebuked him. His father felt it was inappropriate for him to suggest that any of the family would bow to him. The brothers were jealous, and the father was curious.

The suggestion that the parents would subject themselves (willingly, of personal choice) to their child was highly inappropriate. Then, it WAS NOT the type of thing a teen should even hint at concerning his parents. Joseph revealing his dream to his parents was unwise and most inappropriate.

The depth of the brothers' resentment is seen in what followed. Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers (apparently all the older ones born to Bilah, Zilpah, and Leah) who were tending Jacob's flocks. When the brothers saw Joseph in the distance, they plotted to kill him, and Joseph's dreams are specifically mentioned as a reason for their resentment. Though Joseph was sold into slavery rather than killed, the brothers acted on a resentment fueled by jealousy and hatred. Joseph was not a beloved younger brother who was adoringly cared for by his older half-brothers!

The depth of the animosity of the half-brothers for Joseph is seen in their desire to kill him. The significance of Joseph's dreams is seen in the role it played in their motives. They thought they could end the significance of his dreams by killing him (Genesis 37:19, 20)! How often humans conclude they can end or divert God's purposes through a premeditated act of the human will! [See Acts 5:27-34.]

The astounding transformation is seen in the faith-filled, responsible adult this self-centered teenager became. It was not until he lost his position of privilege that his faith governed his life! Privilege produced the arrogance of self-importance! Hardship produced the faith of dependence on God!

Joseph literally went from existing as the favorite son of a wealthy man to be a slave, from a master of slaves to be a slave! Rather than turning to bitterness, he turned to dependence on God.

It is nothing short of amazing to see the transformation from the arrogant teen who was the favorite son of a wealthy man to the adult slave who had little control over his future. Adversity can (a) force us to realize our limitations and (b) make it evident we have little control over our future. The key is found in our attitude toward adversity--do we react against the injustice of the situation with an anger that enslaves us, or do we trust God in an undesirable situation?

Evidently, Jacob did a commendable job in teaching Joseph about the God of Abraham. It is highly doubtful that Joseph would depend on the God he did not know. Joseph's answer to Potiphar's wife when she sought to seduce him is profound: "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). He could not abuse a kind master or **sin against God! NOT**, "I have been the victim of a great injustice--I must look out for myself in my unfortunate circumstance."

The only way Joseph could have depended on God was for him to know about God. Joseph's reaction to his slavery provides a thoughtful contrast between a life of arrogance and a life of humility. Someone did a good job of teaching Joseph about God, and adversity did a good job of humbling Joseph.

Three striking expressions of Joseph's faith must not be overlooked. (a) His faith in the incident with Potiphar's wife. (b) His faith expressed in his ability to interpret dreams [Genesis 40:8 -- "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Genesis 41:16--"It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."] (c) His view of his past as a slave [a horrible experience filled with injustices lasting for years]. "Then his brothers also came and fell before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' So, he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (Genesis 50:18-21).

Understand the stories of each of these three instances. Place them in context. Make them come alive to your students.

Do not think an early self-centered arrogance in life destroyed your ability to turn to and depend on God. Do not think the occurrence of the undesirable in your life is your enemy--at times [if the person lets it happen] the undesirable produces dependence on God instead of dependence on self. Let God work in your life in every circumstance you work in! Let everything that happens to you in your life turn you more deeply to God, not against Him. He or she who spends his or her time feeling sorry for self-wastes his or her life. Never waste your life by inactively dwelling on injustices. Always remember, everyone deals with the reality of injustice!

Help your students understand that past mistakes do not make present faith impossible.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is seldom encountered?

It is rare to find a righteous person who does not wish he or she could change something that happened in his or her past. Even the best people wish they could change things in their past.

2. What is not unusual?

It is not unusual to hear people of experience wish they did things differently in their past.

3. What undesirable attitudes seemed to reside in Joseph as a teenager?

He had a sense of privilege and self-importance that was insensitive to others.

4. How did his father contribute to the problem?

Joseph's father made it obvious that he loved Joseph more than his other sons.

5. What intensified the problem?

Joseph's dreams intensified the problem.

6. How did the brothers show the depth of their resentment directed at Joseph?

Their plan to kill Joseph revealed the depth of their resentment.

7. Cite three striking expressions of Joseph's faith as an adult.

a. *Joseph's faith in God when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him.*

b. *Joseph's faith in God when he had the gift of interpreting dreams.*

c. *Joseph's faith in God when he viewed his past slavery experience after his father died.*

8. What should you not think about early self-centered arrogance?

You should not think past arrogance destroys present ability to turn to and depend on God.

Lesson Eight

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Learn from Moses: The Disgusted Leader

Scripture: Numbers 11

The point of this lesson: God is not distressed with us when we experience times of discouragement.

It took a lot to convince Moses to accept God's mission to return to Egypt and become Israel's leader! The questions Moses raised are not seen as excuses, but as genuine issues in Moses' mind. To Moses, these were legitimate concerns.

God is not our enemy when we experience "real life" concerns instead of being men and women of faith. Too often we consider ourselves the solution. It often is genuinely discouraging to be forced to realize we cannot "fix" all the situations we want to improve. As a rule, no person can "fix" what he or she did not break.

Before we acknowledge Moses' questions, remember the circumstances that led to his encounter with God. Read Exodus 2:11-25. Moses, as an adult who grew up in Pharaoh's (the king's) palace, tried to protect a Hebrew slave from an Egyptian. His defense of the Hebrew resulted in the death of the Egyptian. While Moses thought his act was not common knowledge, he learned the next day from two who were Hebrews fighting that his act was common knowledge among the Hebrews. The result: Moses was afraid. Though he seemingly knew his Hebrew origin, the Hebrews rejected him and were a source of danger to him.

Read about and prepare yourself to discuss Moses' first attempt to rescue a Hebrew from an Egyptian.

Moses was not wrong about Pharaoh's reaction when he learned of Moses' act. To survive, Moses fled to a remote region far from the Egyptian influence. There he lived a solitary life as a shepherd in the wilderness. He literally abandoned life in Egyptian society's highest level to become a shepherd in a remote wilderness. Attempting to help the Hebrews cost Moses a lot! To Moses, it was obvious the Hebrews wanted nothing to do with him. To Moses, he would not merely show up, say, "I am your leader," and the Israelites say, "Hurrah! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

Note (1) Moses was correct about Pharaoh's reaction to Moses' deed and (2) Moses was quite hesitant to make himself vulnerable to the Hebrews again. Experience suggested the Hebrews did not want his help. He did not think they would bestow leadership on him simply because he asked them to do so.

Consider Moses' hesitation questions. "Who am I to go back and be Israel's leader" (verse 11)? Had not he already demonstrated he had no influence with the royal family and no influence in Israel? "Who will I say You are" (verse 13)? Israel had been around Egypt's gods for generations and knew their names. They surely would ask, "What is the Name of the God you represent? How can I hope to have any credibility if I cannot tell them Your name?" Moses then asked, "What if they do not believe You sent me" (4:1)? God gave Moses miraculous acts. Moses responded, "Please send someone else--I am not eloquent!" He certainly did not have a good past record! He also had been alone for quite a while! Can you see why he had no self-confidence?

Moses' questions indicate a massive lack of confidence. Commonly, rejection when one makes a serious, sacrificial effort attacks the person's willingness to try again. No one likes rejection!

Finally, Moses returned and became an exceptional leader. Though Pharaoh was hesitant and the Israelites distrustful, through God Moses achieved Israel's release and a successful crossing of the sea. God spoke to Moses face to face as one spoke to his friend (Exodus 33:11) -- unlike God spoke to any other prophet (Deuteronomy 34:10; Numbers 12:7, 8).

When Moses replaced confidence in self with confidence in God, he became an exceptional leader. God paid tribute to the kind of person Moses became by communicating with Moses as He did with no other person. The quality of communication with a person (first name basis, possession of private telephone number, access, etc.) often is a primary indicator of the depth of the relationship.

Once Israel depressed Moses. Moses reached the point that enough was enough! He listened to all Israel crying because they were homesick for Egypt. (What an awful sound must have been produced by a whole nation crying!) Moses said to God, "You are being too hard on me! Why do You burden me

with these people? I did not conceive them! I did not bring them here! I cannot feed them the meat they want! I cannot do this anymore! If this is the way You are going to treat me, kill me so I do not have to look at what a failure I am!"

Israel's complaining, and crying came at a time when it was too much for Moses to take. His reaction was, "The need is too great! The whole situation is unfair! I would be better off dead!"

Instead of God reacting against Moses, He gave Moses help. He understood, and He responded with understanding. He did not make Moses suffer because of Israel's lack of faith.

Many would picture God as reacting with a "how dare you" attitude. God did not react that way. God understood Moses' situation and need, and God helped.

God is not your enemy because you have moments of struggle! God is not your enemy because you take your difficulties to Him. Take Hebrews 4:14-16 to heart.

This scripture should verify God's desire to help us. God does not want to be our enemy. He wants to be our helper.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Please note:

1. Jesus Christ is our high priest because we are weak.

A high priest was to represent the weaker to the stronger. Because of what Jesus did, God cannot misunderstand our struggles.

2. Jesus Christ understands what we endure.

Jesus has been a human and understands the agony and pull of temptation.

3. In our weakness, we should have confidence in God's concern.

We need God even more in moments when we know we are weak than in moments when we are convinced we are strong. (The truth is that we always are weak. We merely think at times we are strong.)

4. We do not go to God because we are strong, but because we are in need.

Our awareness of need and failure should motivate us to turn to God. The problem is not God's being ashamed of us, but it is our being ashamed of ourselves.

5. When we go to God, we expect to receive mercy and find grace.

We should go expecting help, not condemnation.

This is not an encouragement to develop a "do nothing" attitude, but to cultivate the attitude of confidently going to God in moments of distress. Go to God assured of God's concern for us! God always has been a source of help to those who dare to be His people.

This does not urge Christians to do nothing. It urges Christians to realize that God is for us, will never abandon us even in our weakest moments. God takes no delight in administering consequences! His sending Jesus for us proves the depth of His concern for us.

For Thought and Discussion

1. Moses did not consider his questions as excuses, but as what?

To Moses, his questions were declarations of genuine issues he must deal with.

2. What circumstances led to Moses' questions and encounter with God?

The answer to this question centers in Moses reaching out to a Hebrew when he was harmed by an Egyptian.

3. To escape the Egyptian Pharaoh (king), what price did Moses pay?

He left life at the highest level of Egyptian society to be a shepherd in a remote wilderness.

4. List and discuss Moses' hesitation questions.

- a. *Who am I to go back and lead Israel? (Had he not demonstrated his ineffectiveness?)*
- b. *Who will I say You are? (They will surely ask.)*
- c. *What if they do not believe me? (They rejected him the first time.)*
- d. *I am not eloquent. (Obviously, I am not a persuasive person.)*

5. What indicated Moses' special relationship with God?

He spoke to him face to face, as one does with his friend.

6. Discuss how Israel discouraged Moses in Numbers 11.

The crying of Israel disheartened Moses. The sound of massive mourning must have been a horrible sound!

7. Discuss Moses' reaction to Israel's discouragement.

He felt powerless to change a situation he did not produce. He felt the situation was unfair to him. He wanted God to kill him instead of letting him see his ineffectiveness.

8. How did God react to Moses' remarks?

God helped Moses instead of reacting against Moses.

9. God is not what because you have times of struggle?

God is not your enemy because you struggle.

10. Give five (5) points we should note in Hebrews 4:14-16.

- a. *Jesus Christ is our high priest because of our weakness.*
- b. *Jesus Christ understands what we endure.*
- c. *In our weakness, we should have confidence in God's concern for us.*
- d. *We do not go to God because we are strong, but because we are in need.*
- e. *When we go to God, we expect to receive mercy and find grace.*

Lesson Nine

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Learned from Elijah: The Man Who Ran Scripture: 1 Kings 19

The objective of this lesson: to remind us that godly people have moments of weakness. Few things are so disheartening to devout, dedicated Christians as failing after having made an earnest spiritual effort. Many Christians by nature are known as "fixers." They want to eliminate the "unnecessary" by opening eyes, increasing understanding, and attuning hearts to God.

Try to distinguish between the desire to improve matters where one can and the desire to fix. The desire to improve is the desire to make things better in an understanding that not everyone will seek improvement. It also recognizes that "my better" may not address the whole problem. When some things get better, other things may get worse. The desire to fix often is: (1) A passionate commitment to influence others to "see the entire situation as I do." (2) An equal commitment to influence others to adopt "my solution" to the whole situation. (3) The desire to make things be "just as I think they should be." Many times, a desire to fix approaches "the end justifies the means" mentality.

Consider some examples. (1) People close to them have not seen or responded to God's gift in Christ. That is such an unnecessary circumstance! They yearn to fix it. (2) There is so much marital distress all around them--spouses together but no relationship, abuse, affairs, selfish neglect, divorce, etc. All this is so destructive! These Christians yearn to fix it. (3) There is so much economic distress around these Christians. That unnecessary distress is passed from generation to generation! They yearn to fix it. (4) The congregation is out of step with God's purposes. Things would be so improved if the converted better understood God's purposes! They yearn to fix it.

Let the students cite other examples as they wish.

This does not at all suggest that the human desire to address spiritual needs in a godly manner is evil. Problems are created when: (1) Christians decide God's involvement is limited to what they see; or, (2) they decide that the results they desire are the only results that achieve God's purposes; or, (3) they assume responsibility that is beyond them; or, (4) they assume God has failed because they have failed.

Focus on the problems created. God sees more than we see. God works even in what we regard to be adversity. Because things are not going as I want does not mean God is inactive.

Consider a statement attributed to Jesus in John 3:19, 20: This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19,20).

Note these things: (1) Some people love darkness. (2) Some people take delight in the fact that their deeds are evil. (3) Some people hate light. (4) Some people do not want the light to expose their deeds. There are people who have no desire to be godly! Nothing any Christian does or says will create that desire! While Christians rarely will know who those people are prior to seeking to encourage them, we should not be surprised when people have no interest in the God we cherish.

There are people who do not wish to be spiritual and refuse to consider spirituality in a personal context. Such people who rebel against the influence of God in their lives have no desire to see themselves for who they are. It takes a great deal of courage, even in godly people, to be willing to see flaws and honestly address them.

Elijah, one of God's greatest non-writing prophets, served God in the northern ten tribes of Israel. These were the people who followed Jeroboam into idolatry.

There is no record of Elijah producing written scripture. Not all prophets of God wrote. Though Elijah did not produce written scripture, Jews considered Elijah as the symbol of God's prophets. Consider Matthew 17:3.

"Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.' So, the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.' He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan" (1 Kings 12:26-29).

Elijah served in alien territory. He assumed he was the only person faithful to God in the territory of the ten tribes (1 Kings 19:10). He yearned to "fix" Northern Israel, so they again worshipped/served the living God of the ancient forefathers instead of idols. In fact, he thought he had "fixed" the situation in his contest with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18. God's sacrifice was consumed, the prophets of Baal were killed, the people fell on their faces and confessed that the Lord was God, and it rained.

Discuss how living in Elijah's circumstances would intensify his desire to fix the situation. Discuss how he would think the triumph of God over idolatry would turn the situation around.

However, nothing changed! When Queen Jezebel sent him, a message saying he would be dead in 24 hours, he was afraid and ran for his life (1 Kings 19:3). Though he faced 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19) in a contest the day before, though he proved God told him to have the contest (1 Kings 18:36),

though the people confessed the Lord was God (1 Kings 18:39), things did not turn out as he expected. The result: he was disappointed in himself (1 Kings 19:4).

Emphasize that a situation does not change unless the people in the situation change. Imposing rules that must be followed does not guarantee a faith that will guide. We want to build faith--only that is sufficient for the spiritual demands produced by any ungodly society.

Basically, God informed Elijah of two things: (1) God had 7000 who served Him that Elijah did not know about. (2) Elijah's responsibility was to do his work and stop anticipating the Lord.

It is always a mistake to limit God to our desires and visions. God is at work even in those moments when we see nothing.

Christians deeply want God's influence to be the predominant influence in our nation and eventually in our world. Perhaps because we live in a nation that honors justice, champions human rights, loves freedom, and values the "underdog," we want heaven on earth in our nation soon. Increasingly, evidence declares this will not happen. Yet, we want it to happen so much that we want to "fix" those situations that prevent it from happening. Is something wrong in the congregation? Get spiritual and fix it! Is something wrong in society? Get political and fix it! Is something wrong in the world? Economically or scientifically, fix it!

It is impossible for us to produce heaven on earth. We do not serve God for the benefits of now but for the benefits of when we are with Him.

Let Elijah teach us who follow God through Christ two things. (1) Never limit God's works to the desires of our visions. (2) Our responsibility is to do what God grants us the ability to do.

When we do what we can, the results exceed our imagination. It is not what we can do, but what God can do through us. Following God in this world is not always fun--the experience of Jesus' cross was not a fun experience.

The issue is not, "Do I see where this is going?" The issue is, "Does God see where this is going?"

For Thought and Discussion:

1. Many Christians, by their nature, wish to be what? What is that?

We wish to be fixers. We want to make things occur or be what we want them to be.

2. Give at least 4 examples of this desire.
 - a. *People close to them have not responded to Christ.*
 - b. *Christians want to end the marital distresses they see.*
 - c. *Christians want to end economic distress.*
 - d. *Christians want to make congregations ideal.*
3. Is it evil for Christians to want things to be better?

No, that desire is not evil.

4. When are problems created?
 - a. *Christians decide God's involvement is limited to what we see.*
 - b. *We decide the results we desire are the only results that achieve God's purposes.*
 - c. *We assume responsibility that is beyond us.*
 - d. *We assume God has failed because we have failed.*
5. What should Christians understand from John 3:19, 20?

Not everyone wishes to be a godly person.

6. Explain some of Elijah's circumstances.

He lived and worked among the ten tribes that broke away from the nation and worshipped idols.

7. What did Elijah assume?

He assumed he was the only person faithful to God in the area.

8. What did he yearn to do and think he had done?

He yearned to fix the situation and briefly thought he had when he won the contest with the prophets of Baal.

9. Why was Elijah disappointed in himself?

The fact that his fear of Jezebel's threat caused him to run disappointed him in himself.

10. What were the two things of which God informed Elijah?
 - a. *There are 7000 you do not know about who have not worshipped idols.*
 - b. *Your responsibility is to do your work and stop anticipating me.*
11. What do many Christians deeply want God to do?

They want heaven to exist now in our nation.

12. Give two lessons we Christians should let Elijah teach us.
 - a. *Never limit God's works to the desires of our visions.*
 - b. *Our responsibility is to do what God grants us the ability to do.*

Lesson Ten

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Can Learned from Saul: Wasted Potential

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9, 10, 11:12-15, and 15

The objective of this lesson: To stress that godly potential can be wasted.

One of the great griefs in life is to know what could have happened but did not happen. The problem was not a lack of abilities. God gave the person or persons the necessary gifts to accomplish the task in

a godly manner. The problem was not a lack of opportunity. The opportunity existed. Then what was the problem? Either (1) the person or persons did not trust the abilities/gifts God gave, or (2) the person or persons did not see the opportunity, or (3) the person or persons abused/wasted the gifts, the opportunity, or both.

Stress that most of us have regrets about our past. To look at a past happening or past choice you made with a sense of regret does not make you unusual. Nor does the magnitude of the situation or the choice make you unusual. Many have reacted in the same way to your situation or made the same choice.

Rare is the individual who does not look at his or her past in life's rearview mirror and wish he or she had made different decisions at key moments that would have produced a different life. Think of how much your life would have changed if (1) you went to a different school; (2) you prepared for a different career; (3) you married or did not marry; (4) you selected a different spouse; (5) you had more children, fewer children, or no children; (6) you did not believe in God; (7) you trusted God more [had more faith]; (8) the resurrection of Jesus Christ had no impact on your life; (9) you grew up in and lived in a different country; etc. All your life you made choices that make you who you are now. Different choices would have radically impacted who you are and how you live.

Stress (a) everyone evaluates past decisions, and (b) most look at some choices they made with a sense of regret.

Today you are asked to consider a man who had an incredible opportunity yet wasted himself and his life because he developed and surrendered to bad attitudes.

Ask them to consider Saul from a view that differs from "an abbreviated Bible story." This study may challenge some long-held but unthought about or spiritually unevaluated concepts.

Few people have enjoyed the privilege of being hand-picked by God for a task and given by God His Spirit to achieve that task. Saul came from a father who was a mighty man of valor [a man of wealth and influence] (1 Samuel 9:1). Saul himself had a striking physical appearance--no one in Israel exceeded him in good appearance or height. He had the physical appearance that blessed leadership ability! Physically, he looked like a leader! Saul also was compassionately humble. (a) He did not brag to his uncle about Samuel's appointment. (b) When what are described as "worthless" [sons of Belial] men insulted him at his inauguration, Saul was silent (1 Samuel 10:27). When Saul later proved his worth, he saved these men's lives (1 Samuel 11:12, 13). (c) Saul was "hand-picked" by God to be Israel's first king (1 Samuel 9:15-17) and was given God's Spirit (1 Samuel 10:6)!

Stress Saul's advantages. For example, discuss the importance of "looking the part"; emphasize the importance of one's physical looks not detracting from the ability to accept the responsibility. Discuss the importance of attitude in leadership. Discuss the advantages of God knowing you can do the task (suggesting that God knowingly picked Saul to fail contains more questions than answers).

Saul, however, became a very anxious man. In his personal anxiety [and growing refusal to trust God], he became obsessed with himself to the point that he trusted no one. When Samuel did not appear for a sacrifice when Saul expected (1 Samuel 13:8-14), Saul offered the sacrifice, and his action was

inappropriate. When his son was devoted to David as a best friend, Saul was irate at Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:30-34). Though David was loyal to Saul constantly in ways many of us would regard as foolish, Saul repeatedly tried to kill David because he saw David only as a rival. When God gave Saul a mission to the Amalekites with specific instructions, Saul dishonored God's request in the desire to (a) do things his way and (b) memorialize his victory (1 Samuel 15:11- 23). When Samuel finally caused King Saul to see the sin, Saul was more concerned about how the leaders of Israel would view him than he was about how God viewed him (1 Samuel 15:30).

What Saul became was not at all what God knew Saul had the potential to be. Note that all Saul's problems began with the way he looked at himself (which was not at all the way God saw him). When we look to self (instead of God) for our sense of security, we increasingly become very insecure persons. A focus on self generates anxiety because physical limitations increasingly swallow us. The more we use self to seek to make ourselves secure, the more insecure we feel and act. Attempts to "prove" how "good we are" can be smoke screens to hide our inadequacies. Beware of super-confident people because an exaggerated sense of confidence at times is used to hide the fears of insecurity.

God was so disappointed in Saul that God began a new dynasty in Israel that would eventually produce the Messiah, Jesus Christ (1 Samuel 16:1; Matthew 1:1, 16). The problem with Saul was not potential or lack of ability. It was developing an ungodly attitude, holding to that ungodly attitude, and increasingly surrendering to that ungodly attitude regardless of what it did or what it cost him.

Discuss the concept of disappointing God. Discuss the tragedy of justifying an ungodly attitude rather than recognizing and confronting a personal inadequacy.

God has blessed your life with blessings that exceed your awareness. He has made it possible for you to see His purposes and His Spirit in ways godly people before Jesus Christ were never privileged (consider 1 Peter 1:10-12). Most Christians have potential and opportunity beyond their comprehension.

Discuss some of the blessings of which we are aware. Note the advantages we enjoy because of those blessings. Note how those blessings can be abused or perverted.

Our problems are not created by a lack of opportunity or ability, but by one or a combination of these things:

Discuss which of these things are common problems. Talk about why they are problems. The objective is to heighten awareness (a) that these things are problems and to note (b) why these things are problems.

- a. Personal anxiety about the future.
- b. A distrust of God.
- c. A failure to grow in an understanding of God's nature and character.
- d. An unwillingness to do what God equips us to do coupled with desires to do things we are not equipped to do.
- e. A self-centered abuse of God's gifts to us rather than regarding ourselves as stewards of God's gifts.

- f. A view of sin and death as unconquerable enemies rather than viewing sin and death being destroyed as our controllers by God in Jesus' death and resurrection.
- g. A sense of worthlessness that refuses to allow God to give us worth.

You have one life to live. You have a definite number of days of opportunity to serve God's purposes. The opportunities that come your way are limited. The surest way for you to waste your time and opportunities is to assume you always will have them. The moment will come for each of us when either health or age will limit us. No one is wise enough to make "all" decisions wisely. No one lacks the ability to make much of decisions wisely. Do not waste life. Do not look back on life with deep regret because you abused, wasted, or thoughtlessly used time and health. Learn, and never stop learning! Understand, and never fear growing in understanding! Bless the rest of your life with the wisdom that comes from learning and understanding!

The objective is to see time and opportunity as precious gifts that are not to be neglected or abused. Making people feel hopeless is NOT the objective. Use what you learn from past mistakes to live the "now" more wisely.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is one of the great griefs in life?

One of the great griefs in life is to know what could have happened but did not happen.

2. What are three expressions of the problem in this lesson?
 - a. *We do not trust the abilities/gifts God gave us.*
 - b. *We do not see the opportunity.*
 - c. *Both.*
3. Few people enjoyed the privilege of what two things?

Few enjoyed the privilege of being hand-picked by God and being given God's Spirit for the task.

4. Give three examples of Saul's good qualities.
 - a. *He did not brag.*
 - b. *He did not take vengeance on those who doubted him.*
 - c. *He was hand-picked by God and given God's Spirit.*
5. What did Saul become?

Saul became anxious.

6. Give some examples of Saul's anxiety.
 - a. *Saul's inappropriately offering a sacrifice prior to a battle.*
 - b. *Saul's attitude toward Jonathan because Jonathan was such a good friend to David.*
 - c. *Saul's jealousy of David.*
 - d. *Saul's attitudes in the incident with the Amalekites.*
7. How disappointed was God with Saul?

God promised to take the kingdom of Israel from Saul's sons. God made a new dynasty through whom He sent the Messiah (Christ).

8. What was Saul's problem?

He developed an ungodly attitude and held to it regardless of its impact or cost.

9. List seven things given in this lesson that cause people problems today.

- a. *Personal anxiety about the future.*
- b. *A distrust of God.*
- c. *A failure to grow in an understanding of God's nature and character.*
- d. *An unwillingness to do what God equipped us to do coupled with desires to do things we are not equipped to do.*
- e. *A self-centered abuse of God's gifts to us rather than regarding ourselves as stewards of God's gifts.*
- f. *A view of sin and death as unconquerable enemies rather than viewing sin and death as being destroyed as our controllers by God in Jesus' death and resurrection.*
- g. *A sense of worthlessness that refuses to allow God to give us worth.*

10. How many physical lives do you have to live?

We each have one such life.

11. What is a sure way to waste your time and opportunity?

It is to assume you always will have time and opportunity.

12. What two things should you always do?

You should always learn and understand.

Lesson Eleven

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Must Learn from David: The Adulterer Who Murdered Scriptures: 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25

The objective of this lesson: To stress the value of a heart that belongs to God.

Self-justification is a horrible flaw! Through it we do things we are convinced we would never do. It is amazing to see what evil we can do when we reason we are right. In the unwavering conviction that we are correct, we yield to ungodlike thoughts and behavior, fully believing we are justified in the way we act.

One significant reason Christians sin and endure the consequences of sin is this: they fail to have hearts that belong to God. This is not intended to suggest that the only reason Christians suffer sin's consequences is a heartless association with God (rather than a heart relationship with God). It does emphasize that obedience to God must be both internal as well as external.

God rejected King Saul as being the source of a dynasty in Israel because he was a rebellious man whose heart did not belong to God (see 1 Samuel 15:10, 11; 20; 22, 23). When God selected Saul to be Israel's first king, Saul was a humble man who was both handsome and tall (1 Samuel 9:2). When God selected David to be Israel's second king, God stressed the heart rather than the physical appearance (see 1 Samuel 16:1, 7; Luke 16:15; Acts 13:22). The criteria for God's purposes exceeded the criteria of people's desires. For God's purposes, an obedient heart is more important than a royal physical appearance.

The primary contrast between King Saul and King David is this: Saul migrated to a heartless association with God based on a no-heart relationship with God; David maintained a heart relationship with God--repenting when he realized he had failed to maintain that heart relationship with God. A heartless association with God uses self-justification as its basis. A heart relationship with God accepts rightful responsibility by repenting when sin is recognized. Sin is not recognized until self-deception ends.

David demonstrated a courageous obedience many times prior to becoming Israel's king. Twice he spared King Saul's life because his heart belonged to God (see 1 Samuel 24:2-7 and 26:6-12). Perhaps nothing shows the folly of self-justification versus a heart that belongs to God as does David's conversation with Abigail. An insulted David was blinded by rage until Abigail reminded him that he had never killed to avenge himself. When Abigail reminded David of his heart commitment, David stopped being led by his emotions.

David's heart relationship with God is easily seen in David's acts prior to becoming king. When Abigail reminded David of his heart relationship with God, David's emotional rebellion against God's values quickly ended--self-interests disappeared and were replaced with God-interests.

Unfortunately, later, as King of Israel, David had no one to remind him of his heart in the incident with Bathsheba and Uriah. Again, David was led by his emotions (physical desires) rather than his heart relationship with God. He, unfortunately, was surrounded by "yes men" who sought to please the king. Thus, he invited Bathsheba to come to him, committed adultery with her, and soon learned that she had conceived because of his adulterous act. David immediately acted in self-interest, not in God-interest.

We all need an "Abigail influence" to remind us of our heart relationship with God. Even the godliest person can yield to self-interest. The worst thing that can happen to even the godliest men or women is to be surrounded with "yes people" who encourage self-interest rather than God-interest. Abigail had courage. It takes no courage to be a "yes person."

Bathsheba was a married woman. Her husband, Uriah, was valiantly serving David in David's army. David attempted twice to cover his adultery by having Uriah go to Bathsheba. When David's attempts failed because Uriah proved to be more honorable than David, David had Uriah carry his own death orders to Joab. When Uriah died as a contrived act of war, David quickly took Bathsheba to be his wife.

At times attempts are made to use Bathsheba's actions to excuse David's actions. Most of those attempts make little effort to grasp that culture and the will of a king. Clearly, God held David responsible for his acts. David's desires and self-interest were concerned with David and his reputation. He thought only as a king, not as a man of God.

The incident had passed. David's deed was history--perhaps forgotten since it was "successfully" covered. However, to God, it was not covered. The consequences of the act were in the present and in the future.

God continues to see what we think is hidden. Examine 1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Chronicles 28:9, and Luke 16:15.

Two factors are obvious when Nathan told his parable. (1) Injustice could still enrage David. Though he was guilty of unthinkable injustice, the injustices of others infuriated him. How often our flaws seen in others make us angry, unreasonable people! (2) David's evil acts were acts against God, not just acts against Uriah as a husband and soldier. David was responsible for Uriah's death (though he did not kill him)! David took his wife! However, more important than that, David represented God. He had despised God because his acts were evil. God's enemies had reason to rejoice because of David's evil acts!

Contrast David's rage at the man in the parable with his pierced conscience when he realized he was the man. Angry emotion immediately went to responsible confession/ acknowledgment. There was no self-justification in his response, only repentance. It took courage for Nathan to confront the king!

What is the difference in Saul's rebellion against God and David's rebellion against God? (1) Initially, in Saul's rebellion Saul insisted that he did obey God (1 Samuel 15:20, 21). When Saul finally admitted he sinned, he was as concerned about being honored before the elders of Israel as he was about worshipping God (1 Samuel 15:30). (2) David immediately saw and confessed he was a sinner. He immediately understood that his acts offended the Lord, even beyond being offenses against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 12:13).

Stress two things. (1) Saul's insistence he had not sinned versus David's immediate response, "I have sinned." (2) Rebellion against God is more serious than the act of adultery or the act of murder. The rebellion against God was a separate issue. Disgracing God before His enemies is not an insignificant thing! The adultery and murder were the vehicles to express the rebellion. David had a heart problem. David temporarily took possession of his heart (in his self-centeredness) as he forgot to whom his heart belonged. When we knowingly sin, we immediately need to examine our hearts.

David's heart belonged to God. Repentance demanded he accept responsibility for what he did. Instead of justifying what he did, he accepted responsibility for what he did.

When our hearts belong to God, we do not resort to self-justification in a futile attempt to evade responsibility. People whose hearts belong to God repent!

Please notice that having a heart that belongs to God does not demand perfection. It demands the responsibility of repentance. Note the distinction between repentance and self-justification. (1) From Saul, the kingdom was torn (1 Samuel 15:28). For Saul, there would be no lineage who would be Israel's kingly dynasty. God's promise to Abraham would not be fulfilled by his family. The Messiah (Christ) would not come to our world through Saul's descendants. (2) David was forgiven. His sin (not the consequences of his sin) was taken away. By law, David and Bathsheba deserved to die (see Leviticus 20:10; 24:17). David was ready to accept the personal consequences of his sin. That is why

Nathan told him he would not die. While violence would not depart from his family, while he would be publicly humiliated, God would fulfill His promise to Abraham through David's descendants. The Messiah would come through David's generations. David's legacy would be a bright spot in Israel's history.

Stress that the emphasis is not on human perfection (all humans, even the godliest, are horribly flawed). The emphasis is on the power of repentance. Contrast King Saul and King David's personal reactions to rebellion. God's response to repentance is radically different from God's response to human self-justification--even when we say we did it for God/worship!

If you are convinced you have God figured out, remember these things. (1) David could keep Bathsheba as his wife. (2) Bathsheba's son was called Jedidiah by God--meaning "loved by God." (3) That son, better known as Solomon, became Israel's third king.

Never forget the power of repentance because one's heart belongs to God. Do not err by trying to predict the actions of a holy God towards unholy people who repent!

Give your heart to God. Be willing to repent. Remind yourself of repentance's power by reading Luke 15.

No human can be perfect. All humans can repent. God expects us to do what we can do.

For Thought and Discussion

1. What is a horrible flaw?

Self-justification is a horrible flaw.

2. In what unwavering conviction do we yield to ungodlike thoughts and behavior?

We yield in the unwavering conviction that we are right.

3. Why did God reject King Saul? Why did God select David to be king?

King Saul increasingly rejected personal responsibility for his actions and increasingly resorted to self-justification. King David accepted personal responsibility and repented. King Saul's heart did not belong to God. King David's did.

4. What did Abigail do to redirect an insulted David blinded by rage?

She reminded David that never had he killed to avenge himself.

5. Why did King David commit adultery with Bathsheba?

He was led by his emotions (physical desires) rather than his heart relationship with God.

6. How did Uriah die?

Uriah died by a contrived act of war. It looked like an act of war killed him when his death was planned/manipulated by David's orders.

7. To whom was the act not covered?

David's acts were not covered to God.

8. What two factors are obvious from Nathan's parable and David's reaction?
a. *Injustice could still enrage David.*
b. *David's evil acts were acts against God beside being acts against Uriah and Bathsheba.*
9. As sinful as adultery and murder were, what was even worse in David's sins?

Though David was supposed to represent God, in these matters David despised God.

10. Contrast Saul's rebellion against God with David's rebellion against God.

Emphasize Saul did not repent or confess until he had no choice, and David quickly repented.

11. What does having a heart that belongs to God demand?

It demands the personal responsibility reflected in one's repentance.

12. What 3 things are you asked to remember if you think you have God "figured" out?

- a. *David could keep Bathsheba as his wife.*
b. *David's son, Jedidiah, by Bathsheba, was loved by God.*
c. *That son, whom we know as Solomon, was the third king of Israel.*

13. What 3 things are you asked to do?

- a. *Give your heart to God.*
b. *Be willing to repent.*
c. *Read Luke 15.*

Lesson Twelve

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Can Learn from Jeremiah: The Man of Grief

Scriptures: Jeremiah 7:27-34; 20:7-18

Rarely will you meet a person who does not want to be successful. Rarely will you meet a person who does not have a narrow personal definition of success. For most people, the definition of success begins with something positive. Success achieves something or makes a perceivable difference. Success "looks" like success. Success "feels" like success. Success produces the "benefits" of success.

Christians are prone to form their concept of success based on their society's concept of success. Therefore, too many Christians develop success expectations based on the social concept rather the divine concept. Therefore, when events do not "go as expected" in life, a Christian can be bewildered and confused if he/she expects his/her physical ideal to happen. In some of the most successful (closest) relationships between a human and God in scripture, the person often suffered. Physical suffering does

not equal divine injustice! Physical suffering and spiritual success are not mutually exclusive! A Christian can be spiritually successful and endure physical suffering!

Yet, success may do none of those things. When the results of your efforts produce depression, those efforts do not look like success. When your message causes no change or redirection, the message does not feel like success. When one of the products of your efforts is loneliness, you are not likely to regard your efforts as successful. Most people do not associate success with depression, status quo, or loneliness.

Belonging to God can produce results we often do not associate with success.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12). Jesus associated spiritual success in that first-century context with persecution, insults, and false accusations. He said regardless of how things looked or felt, disciples should be joyful because successful prophets (spokesmen for God) endured the same rejection.

Prophets spoke for God. The most successful prophets we know often endured horrible treatment at the hands of those they sought to help. The joy does not come from the human rejection, but from being dedicated to God and His values.

There was a time in American society that devotion to God was expected to produce (naturally, not manufactured) hardship. Not today! Spiritual success is expected to produce immediate, joyful benefits that look like and feel like success. God protects a Christian from anything he/she considers undesirable. God answers prayers in ways that deliver a Christian from personally undesirable situations. For a Christian, "good" ambitions will be achieved.

Christians need to exercise great care to allow God to define good instead of making their own definitions of good God's definition. Constantly know a Christian does not resort to evil actions to produce what he/she calls good.

Really? No Christian is ever diseased with something like cancer, or dies in a car wreck due to the carelessness of a driver in another vehicle, or loses a desperately needed job, or has a natural disaster take his/her home? Prayer always delivers a Christian in Africa from evil people? Political events in Afghanistan never adversely touch Christian families? Roadside bombs never kill Christians in Iraq? Lawless acts never touch Christians in third world countries? Gangs never exploit Christians in the USA?

Have members of the class relate incidents where Christians experienced the physically horrible but endured by faith in God. Have them also give examples of the physically horrible destroying faith.

In our country we have heard the "health and wealth" gospel in so many forms for such a long time, we are likely to accept it in some form. Never mind that we follow a crucified Savior, never mind that the early church produced many martyrs, never mind that we are taught by an apostle who was placed in more than one prison and was finally killed, that is not the way "it works" now. Faith in Jesus Christ will

prevent the physically undesirable from ever happening to us! We wear the Christian armor! The fight against evil cannot cause us to die in the battle!

Note it is interesting that faith in Jesus Christ commonly resulted in physical suffering in the first century, but physical suffering is regarded as unthinkable today by those who wish to be "first-century Christians." Is there injustice in our suffering for doing good if our Savior suffered for doing good?

Jeremiah was God's spokesman. God selected and prepared him for a special task (see Jeremiah 1:4-10). His mission was not positive: he was to pluck up, break down, destroy, and overthrow to build up by planting (from seed to ripened fruit or grain is a lengthy process!). To make it worse, God told him no one would listen to his message ("God has had it with you!").

God told Jeremiah from Jeremiah's point of selection for his mission that his message would be rejected. However, Jeremiah was unprepared to endure the amount and kinds of rejection he faced. (We often want to put limits on what evil people can do to righteous people when evil people do not answer to God.)

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet for good reason! Though he said precisely what God wanted him to say, his words made no difference. He endured insult, rejection, exploitation, and physical abuse because he cared enough to warn. His loneliness was so severe that he cursed his birth, despised the joy of his father at the announcement of his birth, and wished he had died in the womb. Yet, he successfully did what God wanted him to do. However, because he could not help the people he cared about, it did not look like, feel like, or produce the results of what he considered success. When people sin, love their sin, and are certain they will never suffer consequences for their sin, they do not listen to or like the person who warns them that horrible consequences are coming.

Christians typically want (1) to make a perceivable difference and (2) "fix" situations so they are no longer unrighteous. They struggle when (1) they are unable to see a difference (everything done seems temporary) and (2) nothing seems "fixed" in their lifetime. God often addressed situations that took generations to resolve, not just a lifetime (see 2 Peter 3:8-13). The situations will be changed when we are part of the place where righteousness dwells.

Many times, we suffer the consequences of bad decisions, evil deeds, and sinful choices. None of us want to hear, "Consequences are coming and cannot be avoided!" We want to hear, "There are no consequences! Every situation can be 'fixed'! You have not done anything wrong, and the person who says you did is crazy!" To be the one who bears bad news to those who are guilty of bad lifestyles and choices is to be lonely and unappreciated. One may be successful in declaring precisely what God wishes declared, and, yet, may feel terribly unsuccessful.

Because we have experienced so many good physical things for so long, we expect only good physical things in our future physical life. Faith in God does not guarantee we will experience only good things physically. There is no better way for Satan to charge God with injustice than for believers to experience failed physical expectations.

Do not expect to produce good results in all you do for God! (Make certain your message is from God, and not from your own agenda!)

Simply because you care, do not expect others (even Christians) to perceive that you are motivated by a sense of caring. If what you are or what you say meets with rejection, always remember your faith is in God, not people.

For Thought and Discussion

1. In this lesson, what two things will you rarely do?
 - a. *Meet someone who does not wish to be successful.*
 - b. *Meet someone who does not have a narrow personal definition of success.*
2. For most people, success is defined by beginning with what?

Most people begin their definition of success with something positive.

3. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus associated spiritual success with what?

Jesus associated spiritual success (in that context) with persecution, insults, and false accusations.

4. To whom did Jesus refer to illustrate his point?

Jesus referred to the prophets to illustrate his point.

5. Many Christians expect spiritual success to produce what?

They expect spiritual success to produce immediate joyful benefits that look and feel like success.

6. Illustrate the fact that Christians can also physically suffer.

Christians experience terminal disease, loss by others' carelessness, job loss, natural disaster consequences, suffering caused by evil people, political injustices, and victimization through violence or lawless behavior.

7. Give one reason for today's Christian expecting God to provide special physical benefits.

One reason is continued exposure to some form of the "health and wealth" gospel.

8. Use Jeremiah 1:4-10 to illustrate that Jeremiah's God-given mission was not positive (by our standards).

Jeremiah was to pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow, and plant.

9. Though Jeremiah said what God wanted him to say, his words did what?

Jeremiah's words made no difference (prompted no change).

10. What did Jeremiah endure because of what he said?

He endured insult, rejection, exploitation, and physical abuse.

11. How severe was Jeremiah's loneliness?

He cursed his birth. He wished he had died in the womb.

12. Many times, we suffer consequences for what reasons?

We at times suffer the consequences of bad decisions, evil deeds, and sinful choices.

13. What should a Christian not expect?

We should not expect to produce good results in all we do for God.

Lesson Thirteen

To Develop Our Relationship with God We Can Learn from Jeroboam: Where Will I Find My Security?

Scriptures: 1 Kings 11:26-40; 12

Objective of the lesson: To emphasize the serious bad consequences of placing our source of security in ourselves instead of in our God.

Among the bigger spiritual problems facing today's Christian is the problem of our source of security. The question: what makes us feel secure? Our education? Job? Financial worth? Health? Lifestyle? Opportunities? Connections? Status in the community, state, or nation? Relationship with God? In crunch situations, what makes us feel secure?

Using the wrong source and gauge of security in our lives as Christians is a primary source of many of our problems. If you wish to illustrate the reality of this statement, use the declaration, "Everything would fall into place in my life if ..." Have your students complete that statement as they have heard others say or they themselves would say. Many would say if they won the lottery, if they could pay off bills, if they had a house, if they had a car, etc. Many answers are money-centered or things-centered. In other words, my life would be secure if I had money or had things.

This is a real, immediate question most of us face. If we are transitioning from a lifestyle that indulged physical desires to a lifestyle that focuses on spiritual values, this transition often produces feelings of insecurity. Why? We leave the known and comfortable for the unknown and therefore uncomfortable. Consider these thoughts: after a few years it is the exception to find a male in a job that is the literal outgrowth of his training. Money disappears. Jobs vanish. Health evaporates. The migration from "somebody" to "has been" is frequent. Necessity changes lifestyles and status. Relationship with God seems hypothetical. Increasingly it feels as if we exist in a world of rapid transition. So, what makes us feel lasting security? Do we find what we think is security only to feel insecure?

The immediate physical need tends to cause us stress. It deceives us into believing all would be okay if that need were met. We think that our difficulties are caused by that one need we see. We rarely (1) see how complex needs are or (2) recognize how our mess was produced. The causes of our messes tend to repeat themselves if we do not understand how we got in the bind.

Solomon at first pleased God (1 Kings 3:3; 9:1-9; 2 Chronicles 7:11-18). Later Solomon deeply displeased God (1 Kings 11:9-13). As a result, God intended for Jeroboam to become king over the nation of Israel (ten of the tribes) after Solomon died, and God told Solomon of His plans. God promised Jeroboam He would make Jeroboam's descendants Israel's continuing kings if Jeroboam would obey God and keep God's statutes.

Solomon had incredible opportunity and squandered it. Jeroboam had a great opportunity and did not recognize it.

Soon, Jeroboam faced a security problem. Time passed, Solomon died, and Israel (the ten tribes) made Jeroboam their king. As king, would he trust God to manage the impending situation, or would he trust himself to manufacture solutions to what he regarded to be impending problems?

The problem created by many good opportunities is that such opportunities demand you make decisions about your core values. Do you trust your own judgment? Do you trust God's values?

The dilemma Jeroboam faced was real. In Deuteronomy 16:16, all Israelite men were required to appear in masse at the place God would chose three times a year to present God sacrifices (also see Deuteronomy 12:1-14 and note verses 5, 11, 13, 14). While Jerusalem had been the political capital of the nation since David captured and settled it, and the spiritual capital of the nation since Solomon built and dedicated the temple (see 2 Chronicles 7:12), Jerusalem was not in the territory ruled by King Jeroboam. Thus, if King Jeroboam's people remained faithful to God, the men would travel out of his territory to his enemy's (Rehoboam, Solomon's son) territory to worship God.

Stress that Jeroboam faced a truly real decision. Help your students see that sending the men to Jerusalem seemed a stupid thing to do in his circumstances.

If this occurred, King Jeroboam feared his people (the ten tribes he ruled) would choose to return to the rule of Rehoboam. King Jeroboam feared that the result of Israelites returning to Jerusalem to worship would be a national eruption of patriotism ending in two things: (1) a reuniting of Israel and (2) King Jeroboam's violent death. Would he feel secure to trust his dilemma to God? Or, would he take matters into his own hands? Is that not our dilemma also? Do we trust God to care for the situation, or do we trust ourselves? The stress increases as we "know" what will happen, and what we "know" will happen is NOT acceptable.

Eventually, all hard choices become pragmatic decisions. In pragmatic decisions it is much easier to trust "my gut feeling" than it is to trust God's values. In hard decisions, we prefer to trust ourselves instead of God's values or God's involvement.

What did Jeroboam do? (1) He consulted with people. From his actions, I conclude he consulted with people who shared his anxiety. (When an anxious person consults anxious people, the result is increased anxiety, not insight and wisdom.) (2) Because of his consultations and his anxiety, he built two golden calves, and he erected one in Bethel and one in Dan. (3) He told the people that the journey to Jerusalem was too hard for them to make. (4) He said these golden calves were responsible for delivering their ancestors from Egypt, and they should be honored as their gods. (5) He made priests from people in his kingdom. (6) He instituted worship forms familiar to the people.

Stress to your students that we tend to consult with people who agree with us, so we can have the comfort of telling ourselves, "They agree with me." A wise person gets input from many perspectives. He/she is seeking the best thing to do, not "ego support" in an unwise decision.

What Jeroboam did was extremely offensive to God.

In other words, he had more confidence in himself than in God. He liked his solutions. The results were astounding and filled with far-reaching consequences! He succeeded in replacing the God of Israel with idolatry. (1) Never was there a king over those ten tribes who returned to God. Once Jeroboam set idolatry in motion among those ten tribes, the generations that followed did not forsake idolatry officially. (2) They no longer existed as a nation after they were conquered and displaced by Assyria. They deserted God to their own destruction

We tend to do what we like. Therefore, we should be urged to like the right values. We also need to understand that others who follow us will be affected by our choices.

In matters of your personal sense of security, choose wisely! How do I choose wisely? You take all factors into consideration! You do not let the immediate distress make the decision--look for more than immediate relief! Make a serious effort to distinguish between a spiritually destructive short-term solution and a problem-solving longer-term solution even if it means there will be an immediate distress. Be certain to make God your #1 priority in your decision. Consider the impact of your decision on the generation to follow you.

You neither want to carelessly hasten or to inactively drag your feet when making choices. Individually, don't drag your feet. Collectively, think about what moves God's purposes forward. Do not be held hostage by a minority. Yet, be well informed when you decide. Choose for the right reasons. Always remember more is involved than just your desires.

Before you die, it is quite possible that lifestyles will change radically in America because the middle and poor classes cannot endure the economic pressures exerted by numerous factors. This is no attempt to sound a warning of doom and gloom! It is an attempt to distinguish between the temporary and the eternal. Physical things and situations may be stressful and uncomfortable, but they are temporary. Godly things and situations may be stressful and uncomfortable, but they are eternal. Never allow physical things or situations to blind you to godly things and situations. Be very careful not to neglect God as you determine your source of security!

People urgently need examples of men and women who trust God and His values in difficult situations involving hard choices.

For Thought and Discussion

1. In this lesson, what is one of the bigger problems facing today's Christian?

The problem of Christians' source of security is one of our bigger problems...

2. In this lesson, what is the question? Why is it a real question?

The question is, "What makes us feel secure?" Everyone must decide what gives him/her a sense of security.

3. What promise did God make to Jeroboam?

God promised He would make Jeroboam's descendants a continuing dynasty in Israel just as He did with David in Judah.

4. Illustrate the fact that Jeroboam's dilemma was real.
- To send your men out of your territory was risky.*
 - The possibility of patriotic feelings changing your men's loyalty and commitment is a risk.*
5. What two things did Jeroboam fear would happen if the men of his kingdom returned to Jerusalem?
- His men would reunite the kingdom under Rehoboam.*
 - He would be killed because of his men's desire to reunite the kingdom.*
6. Name six things Jeroboam did in reaction to his problem.
- He consulted with people (who likely shared his anxiety).*
 - Because of his consultations and anxiety, he built two golden calves as idolatrous objects of worship.*
 - He told his people the Jerusalem trip was too hard for them to make.*
 - He told his people the golden calves were responsible for their ancestors' deliverance from Egypt.*
 - He made priests from his people.*
 - He instituted worship forms that were familiar to the people.*
7. Give two results that were consequences of Jeroboam's decision.
- There was never a king over those ten tribes who returned to God.*
 - Eventually Assyria destroyed them as a nation.*
8. Discuss how a Christian chooses wisely.
- You consider all factors.*
 - You do not let distress make the decision.*
 - Distinguish between a short-term solution and a problem-solving solution.*
 - Be certain to make God your # 1 priority.*
 - Consider the impact of your decision on future generations.*
9. What does this lesson attempt to distinguish between?

It attempts to distinguish between the temporary and the eternal.

10. What should never be neglected in determining one's source of security?

Never neglect God!

“Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.”

— John Wesley

WHAT IS A MAN PROFIT

Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give...n give... WHAT IS A MAN PROFIT

Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give...n give...

WHAT IS A MAN PROFIT

Jesus said in Mark 8:36-37 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give...n give... Mar 8:36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Mar 8:37 For what can a man give in return for his soul?

Make sure you are doing everything possible to save your soul