

Leader Guide

# Encounter

BIBLE STUDY FOR ADULTS

March • April • May 2009



# Encounter Leader's Guide

## Using This Guide

The leader helps for each lesson correspond to the lessons in *Encounter* (student book). You will be able to identify the corresponding lessons by date and title. The sub-heads on each guide sheet are the same as those used in the lessons and reference the corresponding page number in the student book. The guide will provide activity suggestions and discussion tips. Use the questions and suggestions to further class discussion and to encourage the group toward action.

## Evaluating

Tell us what you think of this issue by completing and returning the evaluation form at the back of this resource.

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# A New Spirit

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore God's promise of new life made to the Israelite captives in Babylon; (2) to recognize that seeds of hope and new life are often planted in the soil of discipline or punishment; and (3) to seek the new heart and spirit that God promises.

**Background Scripture:** Ezekiel 11:14-21; **Scripture Selection:** Ezekiel 11:14-21

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Jeremiah 31:31-33. *Hymns:* "Glory to His Name," "Wonderful Peace of Jesus," "I Would Be True." *Devotional Reading:* 2 Corinthians 3:1-11.

## Advance Preparation

During the next five weeks the lessons will focus on major portions of Ezekiel. In preparation for the first lesson, read the first eleven chapters of the book. This reading will provide insight into the relationship between God and Ezekiel and between Ezekiel and Israel.

Locate a map of the Ancient Near East for use throughout this unit. Geographical locations figure prominently in each of the Unit 1 lessons.

Provide Bible commentaries, books about life and customs during the time of the exile, and various translations of the Bible. A supply of pencils, markers, loose leaf paper, newsprint, and tape will be useful for all class meetings in this unit.

Because you will be dealing with biblical prophecy over the next five weeks, you might find it helpful to have as a resource *Bruce & Stan's Guide to Bible Prophecy: A User Friendly Approach*, by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 3)

Welcome class members as they arrive, calling each person by name. Welcome any visitors, introducing them to others in the class. Take time for announcements and prayer concerns. Enlist one of the students to lead in prayer.

Discussing ancient and modern Israel may raise questions about end times. Be aware that some persons in the class may be fascinated by biblical prophecy. Try to involve those persons in reading, reporting on assignments, or assisting in other ways so that they can contribute to the class discussion without leading the class away from the lesson topic.

In the Scripture Selection, God promises that those who are living in exile will experience a change for the better in both their physical circumstances and their spiritual lives.

Invite class members to identify ways to deal with and respond to people in crisis. Write their responses on newsprint or an erasable board. Then ask: How have you kept your faith in the midst of seemingly unchanging circumstances? Who inspires you today to maintain hope? How can you help others to have hope? How do our leaders affect our ability to maintain hope?

## From Priest to Prophet (p. 3)

The people of Judah were in chaos. Separated from all that was familiar, even from the temple that served as the center of their worship, they likely felt lost. Ezekiel, as a priest, was in a unique position to step into a leadership role during this time. The people knew him to be a man of God, which may have made the transition to prophet easier.

Encourage class members to talk with one or two other people about these questions: To whom do you turn when the world around you is in chaos? Why? What role does the church have

for you and for the world during such times? How do we stay open to the leading of God's Spirit? How did Ezekiel remain open to the guidance of God's Spirit?

### **A Purpose in Exile** (pp. 3-4)

Imagine for a moment how Ezekiel must have felt. He had been a priest, serving in the temple. Now he was hundreds of miles away from the temple. What purpose could he serve in Babylon? How could God be with the exiles when they were so far from the temple? When have you felt as if God had abandoned you? How did this feeling cause you to re-examine your goals, priorities, and your relationship with God? What was the result?

### **Thus Says the Lord** (p. 4)

During Ezekiel's time, communication was not instantaneous. How would people have heard Ezekiel's prophecy? How can we communicate God's message to others today?

Create a radio news bulletin or a newspaper article dramatizing the hope contained in this passage, not only for the people in exile but also for people today. If your class is large, divide the group into teams of two to five. Give the teams seven to ten minutes to create the announcement or article. Include time for each group to present its work to the class. Tape the messages on the wall for review during later lessons in this unit.

### **God's Presence** (pp. 4-5)

God spoke about his presence with the people in a way not associated with the sacrifices in Jerusalem. He would be a sanctuary to the exiles. In what ways do you see yourself as a sanctuary for God's Spirit? (See 1 Corinthians 6:19.)

### **One New Heart** (p. 5)

The Greek term *one heart* in verse 19 can also be translated *a new heart*. How was God calling the people to have one heart? How does God call Christians today to have one heart?

### **Set in Stone** (p. 5)

Suggest that class members reflect silently on what it means to have a heart of stone. In what areas of your life do you have a heart of stone?

### **What Does This Mean for Us?** (p. 6)

Briefly review the three observations outlined in the student book and invite class discussion. How do you experience God's presence and guidance in your life? How are you or your congregation "stuck in a rut"? What will you do to change that situation?

### **The Challenge for Us** (p. 6)

Talk for a moment about the meaning of God's grace. Ezekiel's words reminded the people of God's grace for them. How have you experienced God's grace? To whom will you offer grace?

### **Closing**

Remind the class members that they will be learning more about Ezekiel next week. Urge them to read the lesson before coming to enhance the group dialogue.

Ask students to bring newspaper or magazine clippings about leadership for use in Lesson 2.

Close class with a time of prayer.

# New Leadership

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore the promise of a new king who will lead God's people as a good shepherd; (2) to identify the traits of good servant leaders, both in others and in ourselves; and (3) to commit ourselves to supporting God's servant-leaders who are in our midst.

**Background Scripture:** Ezekiel 34; **Scripture Selection:** Ezekiel 34:23-31

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Mark 8:31-38. *Hymns:* "There Shall Be Showers of Blessing," "Give of Your Best to the Master," "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us." *Devotional Reading:* John 10:11-18.

## Advance Preparation

Read the Scripture Selection and the lesson comments early in the week. Bring newspaper or magazine clippings of people in leadership roles to supplement clippings the class members share.

Plan to do the role-play suggested on the next page outdoors or in a large open space indoors.

Provide newsprint or an erasable board and markers.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 8)

Help any visitors to feel comfortable in the group. Following announcements and the sharing of prayer concerns, ask for a volunteer to lead in prayer.

Be aware that there may be people in your class who came to your church to escape a poor leadership situation. Be sensitive to any feelings of resentment regarding other churches or their members. In discussing leadership you may find that some people have very strong, cynical opinions on the subject. Encourage them to be patient and open as the lesson unfolds.

Refer to the definition of servant-leaders in the student book. Identify some servant-leaders with whom most class members would be familiar. Encourage students to tell how servant-leaders have been significant in their lives. What qualities of the servant-leader have they tried to imitate?

Using the magazine and newspaper clippings on leadership, have students compare the qualities of leadership that are reflected in contemporary society with the qualities of servant-leaders found in the Scripture Selection. Ask for a volunteer to record the comparisons on newsprint or an erasable board. Leave the information available throughout the class period.

## Background on the Text (p. 8)

Invite class members to identify qualities of a false shepherd. How can we recognize these qualities in people who are or want to be leaders? What is our responsibility in such situations? How can we minister to those who are repulsed by organized religion?

## Judah's Kings (pp. 8-9)

Suggest that class members silently reflect on world, national, and church leaders. What qualities would you expect to find in a leader who thinks first of the flock? How have they put their flocks first?

Many times servant-leaders suffer from burnout. What boundaries for self-care might help a leader to avoid burnout? How is your congregation caring for its pastor and other leaders so that they keep a positive outlook toward the flock and their collective ministry?

## God Will Provide a Good Shepherd (p. 9)

Suggest that class members consider ways they (and others) have dealt with situations involving poor leadership. What does the reference to God's removal of Ahab as king say about confronting poor

leaders today? How does the criteria for loving confrontation (Matthew 18:15-17) apply to the flock? to pastoral leadership?

### **Redirecting the Flock** (p. 9)

Divide the class into two equal groups. Appoint a shepherd for each group, one to be a poor leader and the other to be a reliable leader. Then have the shepherds lead their flocks around the open area. Hint: a poor shepherd would not watch for obstacles or lead the sheep to food or water.

When the group has come back together, reflect on the experience by noting the differences between the experiences of the two groups. You might ask questions such as: How did it feel to be led into an area that was cluttered or where the ground was uneven? How did it feel when the shepherd watched closely to make sure that no one fell or got separated from the rest of the group? Which leader would you rather have? How is the group's behavior eventually influenced by its leader?

### **David—A True Shepherd** (pp. 9-10)

Have someone read Psalm 23. In what ways is this psalm descriptive of the ministry of Jesus? What does it mean for the Lord to have compassion on his church?

The student book refers to the need to keep the entire flock strong. What things might cause a flock to become weak? What role does the availability of resources play in such a situation? How can the church at large be more intentional in strengthening the flock?

### **A Better Shepherd in Charge** (p. 10)

What can the church accomplish when there is a good shepherd in charge? How can the church help a shepherd bring the wounded back to God? to the faith community?

### **A New Garden** (pp. 10-11)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud this section in the student book. Talk briefly about the changes a true shepherd will bring. In what ways does your pastoral leadership team lead help you to develop greater respect for other members of your congregation? How can you follow this example in situations outside the church community?

### **God Is with Them** (p. 11)

If class members would be comfortable doing so, let them share areas of personal spiritual growth. How does personal spiritual growth impact the congregation?

Consider together where God is leading your congregation. How are people showing they trust the servant-leadership (shepherds)? What needs to be done to encourage greater confidence between the leadership and the flock?

### **Summing Up** (p. 11)

Brainstorm ways of reaching out to those who have become disillusioned with organized religion or who have never been part of a faith community. Share your class' ideas with the person who coordinates the mission-evangelism work in your congregation.

### **Closing**

For next week's lesson, ask participants to bring something they have personally repaired or restored. Or suggest they write a short description of a broken relationship that they've help to mend, telling how they were involved in the reconciliation.

Close class with prayer for your pastor and all of the church's leaders.

# God's People Restored

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore God's plan and intention to restore Israel; (2) to recognize that God forgives sin; and (3) to identify characteristics of the new life that results from God's gracious restoration.

**Background Scripture:** Ezekiel 36:22-32; **Scripture Selection:** Ezekiel 36:22-32

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. *Hymns:* "I Sing the Mighty Power of God," "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," "There Shall Be Showers of Blessing." *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 25:11-22.

## Advance Preparation

Read the Background Scripture and student book comments early in the week. Bring to class something that you have repaired or restored.

Check your basic supplies and replenish as needed.

Create a timeline on newsprint. On one end of the paper write "The Date Our Church Was Founded" and on the other end "Today."

Set aside a portion of the class time for prayer.

In advance of next week's lesson, contact someone to speak about living with depression or despair and how God has helped them through the difficult times. Be sure to clarify how much time the speaker will have and ask if he or she will be comfortable answering questions.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 13)

Introduce any guests or visitors to class members. Allow time for housekeeping chores and prayer concerns. Ahead of time, enlist someone to lead in prayer.

The theme of today's lesson is restoring human lives. Set against the backdrop of ancient Babylon, the Scripture Selection speaks to how God has used Gentile nations to advance God's plans.

Emphasize that as Christians we believe God is at work in any and all nations where the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached. There may be strong disagreement as to whether the rise and decline of nations is an indication of God's favor or disfavor. Focus on the redemptive plan of God that called the people of Israel to model God's holiness as a witness to the world.

Invite each person to describe the repaired item he or she brought. If some people didn't bring objects for sharing, give each an index card and pencil. Allow time for them to jot down an example of something they repaired or restored and to tell why they undertook that task.

Why is the repaired item (relationship) important to you? How does it feel when something is restored? How does restoration affect the object or relationship?

## God Speaks to a Place (p. 13)

In great detail, describe to the rest of the class a place that is special to you. Encourage them to think about visiting this place based solely on your description. How might they feel? Explain that many of the exiles likely had similar feelings as they heard God's promises to restore to them to their homeland.

## Affirming God's Name (p. 13)

The student book comments that outsiders thought God was weak. How does this perspective change your understanding of the biblical story? How did God "set the record straight"?

### **Sanctifying God's Name** (pp. 13-14)

In today's culture, the casual and thoughtless use of God's name is rampant. How do you respond to people who misuse God's name? What would it take to eliminate such misuse? In what ways does your congregation witness to God's unique holiness?

God restored the people to their land and provided a means for them to rebuild Jerusalem. Many people who lost their homes to hurricane Katrina are continuing to make mortgage payments on property that is not habitable. Entire communities were destroyed in Myanmar when the cyclone hit. Undoubtedly class members will identify other catastrophic situations. What is our role and/or responsibility in helping to restore and rebuild? What is the church doing to fulfill this role?

### **A Nation Transformed** (p. 14)

Ask class members to write on the timeline the date they joined your church. Have them record a positive change they have witnessed. How did they know God was in the midst of this transformation?

In what ways are people's lives transformed as a result of your congregation's ministry? What are some outreach ministries that you believe the Lord wants to start, stop, or resume through your church? Why?

### **Really Living** (p. 14)

Despite the people's lack of faithfulness, God forgave them and provided for their future. The parallel between God's relationship with Israel and a parent's relationship with a child is very obvious. A parent will continue to love a child, even when it is necessary to punish the child. While a restored relationship is never quite the same as it was before the break, we receive a second chance.

What does it take to restore someone to full fellowship in the faith community? What limitations or restrictions, if any, should be placed on restored church members? How does grace fit into such a situation?

### **Thinking About God's Mercy** (pp. 14-15)

Encourage class members to think of times when they have experienced the grace of forgiveness and the freedom it brings. How do you keep sight of God's grace and mercy in your life on a daily basis? How does having experienced God's grace and mercy affect your relationships with others?

### **Getting It Right** (p. 15)

It is easy to think that God acted solely to restore the exiles to their promised homeland. Yet God had another purpose in mind. When have you witnessed God's actions in and through other people and circumstances? How did God use those times to bring praise to God's name? In what ways is your congregation's worship focused on God's holiness? What would help you focus more intentionally on the Lord during worship?

### **Closing**

In what ways can the church's witness produce new life for the community in which it is located? In what ways might the unchurched hear about the good things that your church is doing and being in the name of God?

Remind class members that the next lesson continues our study of Ezekiel. Encourage them to be diligent in their preparation during the week. Ask them to give particular attention to the meaning of *dry bones* in Ezekiel's vision.

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their participation in the life of the church and in your class.

# Prophesying New Life

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To unpack the metaphor of the valley of dry bones as it applied to the captives in Babylon; (2) to examine our faith communities for signs of both “dry bones” and new life; and (3) to pray that God’s Spirit will enliven us, individually and as a community of faith.

**Background Scripture:** Ezekiel 37; **Scripture Selection:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 107:1-3. *Hymns:* “Ivory Palaces,” “Jesus Paid It All,” “Send the Light.” *Devotional Reading:* Romans 6:1-14.

## Advance Preparation

Early in the week, read all the lesson materials. Confirm that your guest speaker is planning to share with the class concerning a personal experience of God’s renewing, enlivening spirit. You might ask for brief biographical information to use in introducing the speaker to the group. If the speaker will need audio-visual equipment, make arrangements to have that on hand.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 17)

As the group gathers, welcome visitors, take time for announcements, and listen to prayer concerns. As you pray, ask God to enliven the class members individually and as a community of faith.

Today’s lesson focuses on the renewal of life, with emphasis on God’s spoken word. Be aware that some class participants may appear outwardly calm and well adjusted when they actually have serious issues with sadness, repressed anger, depression, or despair.

Read through the entire Scripture Selection together. Then divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to act out the story found in Ezekiel 37:1-7. Encourage the other group to read Ezekiel 37:8-14 dramatically, adding facial and vocal expressions and physical actions. Modify the activity to suit the number of participants and space limitations. In a large class, a third group might compose a song presenting the lesson story, using the tune of a well-known hymn or popular song.

## The Valley of Dry Bones (p. 17)

The student book commenatry says that Ezekiel is teachable. What does it mean to have a teachable spirit?

Imagine yourself in Ezekiel’s shoes. The sight before him was overwhelming, unthinkable. What situations today would you describe in those same terms? How is God teaching you/your congregation to deal with such situations? How are you involved in addressing problems in your community? How has God led you in this activism?

## God’s Question (pp. 17-18)

God asked Ezekiel a question in 37:3. How would you answer it? When has God asked tough questions that you tried to avoid answering? How do you sometimes set limitations on God?

## The Spoken Word (p. 18)

Introduce the guest speaker. When he or she has completed the presentation, allow time for questions (if doing so has been previously arranged with the speaker).

If a speaker was not scheduled, consider this question: How does God continue to give the church new life?

**Inside Out** (pp. 18-19)

God called Ezekiel to speak to the bones as if they were human beings. How do we sometimes fail to treat others as human beings rather than “a cause”?

Think about the ministries in which your congregation is engaged. What relationships have developed out of those ministries? How has God brought radical change to the ministries in which your church is involved? How well has the congregation embraced the changes?

**Outwardly Alive** (p. 19)

Some churches might be described in a manner similar to that used in the student book to describe the reformed bodies—waxwork dummies. Where do you see the need for God to breathe new life? What ministries and workers in your church need renewed spiritual zeal and focus?

**Standing Up** (p. 19)

Often it takes extraordinary circumstances to get diverse groups of people working together (i.e. George H. Bush and Bill Clinton raising funds to help hurricane victims). Yet the newly reformed bodies came together and were ready to hear God’s plan. How has your congregation banded together in times of upheaval? Who were the active leaders? In what ways does your congregation work cooperatively with other Christian groups in your community? What are your greatest challenges in working across denominational lines?

**The Interpretation Unfolds** (pp. 19-20)

Suggest that class members consider areas of divisiveness in their lives, the church, community, and world. What would it take to bring reconciliation? How will you address those areas that affect you directly? indirectly? In what ways do you realize God’s presence abiding with you? your congregation?

**Hope in God** (p. 20)

Invite class members to think of someone they know who always seems to be smiling and have a positive attitude. Then ask them to think of a person who is the total opposite. How does spending most of our time with people who are pessimistic impact our sense of well-being? How does it impact our faith? Why is it necessary to pursue private time with God in order to get a new vision? How do you “hope in God”?

**Getting Up** (p. 20)

Give class members time to reflect silently on what it means to have God’s Spirit available to them. How does serving God bring freedom? Encourage specific examples, if class members are willing to share.

**Closing**

Encourage the group to seek strength through prayer and meditation as they face challenges. Remind them that God will work with them for the advancement of God’s kingdom.

Urge the class to review the past three lessons about Ezekiel in preparation for the last study in the book next week.

# Envisioning New Life

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To imagine the river of life that flows from the throne of God as revealed in Ezekiel 47; (2) to consider how this metaphorical water, flowing fresh from God, sustains our spiritual lives; and (3) to order our spiritual lives so as to remain close to the source of this life-giving water.

**Background Scripture:** Ezekiel 47:1-12; **Scripture Selection:** Ezekiel 47:1-12

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 51:1-12. *Hymns:* “Redeemed,” “Like a River Glorious,” “God Will Take Care of You.” *Devotional Reading:* John 4:7-15.

## Advance Preparation

This lesson plan provides a good movement activity for those who are able. Walk through the motions ahead of time as you read through the Scripture Selection.

Provide markers and newsprint for use by two groups.

As you look ahead to Lesson 6, invite a medical professional or someone who provides pastoral care to discuss the role of spirituality and medicine with the class. If you don’t have human resources of that nature in your congregation, ask someone in the class to research the power of prayer in healthcare settings.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 22)

As you begin the class, take time to welcome visitors and to hear announcements and prayer concerns. Invite a volunteer to lead in prayer, including those concerns that have just been mentioned.

Remind class members of how Ezekiel has experienced God’s presence: the vision of dry bones, giving of prophecy, etc. Explain that today God is again in direct personal contact with Ezekiel. In what settings is God’s presence clearly real to you? Think beyond times of worship.

## A Temple for Worship (p. 22)

As you deal with this section, remember that the people are still living in exile. They need hope for their future. The temple in Jerusalem had been central to their lives and worship. By giving Ezekiel the vision of a new temple, God was assuring the people of that hope. In what ways has God enabled you to experience hope? How can you share with others the hope found in God’s promises?

## An Escorted Tour (pp. 22-23)

Suggest that class members close their eyes and listen as you guide their thoughts by saying: Imagine yourself in the midst of a dry, barren area. It is very hot. No life can exist in this area—not even a cactus or a lizard or a snake—because there is no water. How do you feel as you look at your surroundings? Now think of the difference a flowing source of water would make. The land is producing lush vegetation. Many animals now make their home in the area. How do you feel now as you look at your surroundings?

What does the image of God as being the source of life-giving water mean to you? How can your congregation offer God’s life-giving water to others?

Consider a project that will reach out to those in your midst who seem to be experiencing the barrenness of life without the hope God offers. How will you identify these people? What type of outreach would be most successful in helping them to experience God’s hope?

### **Measuring the Water** (p. 23)

How good are you at following God's leading? What keeps you in a spiritual rut? What spiritual disciplines would persuade you to venture into unfamiliar ministries? What can we learn from Ezekiel's example about following the guidance of God's Spirit?

### **Take a Look Around** (p. 23)

Refer to the guided imagery done earlier. Encourage students to recall their feelings at the transformation of the land from barrenness to lushness. What areas of new life are visible in your congregation? How can you nurture these areas and help them to grow? Who are the "trees with deep roots" in your congregation? What roles do they have in the life of your church? Remember that even trees with deep roots need to be nurtured from time to time. How does your congregation nurture its leaders? What else might you do?

### **The Jordan Valley** (pp. 23-24)

Form the class into two teams. Give each team a marker and newsprint. On the top of one sheet write the word *wilderness* and on the other sheet *fertile land*. Ask the teams to describe characteristics of the area assigned to them. What do the areas have in common? How are they different? What key characteristic separates them? How crucial is water in transforming a wilderness into fertile land? How do these principles apply to our lives?

### **The Dead Sea** (p. 24)

Sin impacts all of creation. What correlation, if any, do you see between sin and the Dead Sea? How does the image of an abundance of fresh water further that correlation? What is the significance of this particular miracle for the Christian?

### **Life Everywhere** (p. 24)

As Christians, we know that God gave us new life through Jesus Christ. In what other ways does God bring new life to God's people?

### **By the Banks of the River** (pp. 24-25)

Reflect on all the things that will happen as a result of the river. Not only has God promised to return the people to their homeland, but God is assuring them of prosperity. They will always have plenty to eat and sources for healing.

Invite class members to comment about the meaning of the trees that would not experience a time of dormancy. How might that reference be symbolic of our lives?

### **Applying the Lesson** (p. 25)

The student book speaks of the encouragement in Ezekiel's message. Think of some specific ways your class can offer encouragement to those who are struggling physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually. How will you implement your plans? What other groups in the congregation need to be involved in your plans?

### **Closing**

Mention that for the remainder of the spring quarter you will be working in the New Testament. Encourage the class to read Lesson 6 before you meet again. Lead in prayer, remembering to pray for those who need to experience God's life-giving water.

# Suffering Unto Death

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore the people and events associated with Jesus' crucifixion as recorded in the Gospel of Luke; (2) to envision ourselves among the various persons who surrounded Jesus as he suffered on the cross; and (3) to affirm that God is with us at all times, even in suffering and death.

**Background Scripture:** Luke 23:32-46; **Scripture Selection:** Luke 23:32-46

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Isaiah 50:4-9. *Hymns:* "All Glory, Laud and Honor," "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Hallelujah, What a Savior." *Devotional Reading:* 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

## Advance Preparation

This lesson begins a unit on the death and resurrection of Jesus. The last session includes two stories from Acts that tell of Peter's witness to the Risen Lord.

You will need hymnals for use during the class.

Write on index cards these words, in the quantities specified: *God* (1), *Jesus* (1), *soldiers* (4), *criminal 1* (1), *criminal 2* (1), *religious leaders* (2 or more), *onlookers* (2 or more), and *female followers* (2 or more).

Locate several different crosses and display them in the learning area.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 27)

As you begin the class, take time for announcements and prayer concerns. Make an effort to help all who are present feel welcome and comfortable. Ask someone who arrives early to be prepared to lead in prayer.

Call attention to the various crosses displayed in the learning area. Explain that this lesson begins a unit on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Suggest class participants use the hymnals to explore the themes of suffering, death, and God's continuing presence. Ask them to find at least five such hymns. Sing one of those hymns together.

Invite someone to review the information in the introductory paragraphs of this lesson. Provide an opportunity for class members to talk about their feelings regarding the suffering and death of Jesus. If you had been alive during this time, what role might you have played in Jesus' life and death?

## Between the Criminals (p. 27)

Suggest class members think about any recent executions of which they are aware. What are the differences/similarities between those situations and Jesus' crucifixion? Why do you think Jesus was forced to endure public humiliation before dying? What purposes did his public death serve?

## They Know Not What They Do (pp. 27-28)

Remind class members of Jesus' prayer from the cross. Then ask: How has this prayer impacted your life? How can we apply this prayer to fellow believers? to those who profess no saving faith?

Reflect together about the soldiers. What might they have been thinking as they gambled for Jesus' clothing? How might Jesus' prayer have affected them?

## Transparent People (p. 28)

Distribute the index cards with the names or titles of the individuals who were present at the crucifixion. Read the Scripture Selection. Ask the participants to imagine some of the feelings of those who were present at Jesus' crucifixion. What is your opinion of the person who is listed on your card?

### **The King of the Jews** (pp. 28-29)

It often seems that when a person is about as low as he or she can get, others take advantage of that vulnerability. Such was the case with Jesus. Maybe the soldiers found it easier to deal with their task if they could dehumanize the victims. How does our society dehumanize and vilify certain people? What role can the church play in standing up for the outcast?

### **Voices of Desperate Men** (p. 29)

Reflecting on one's life can be rather uncomfortable; such was certainly the case for the criminals as they were forced to deal with their own mortality. In what ways have you had to face your mortality? What changes do you need to make so that facing your mortality will be less uncomfortable? How can the way we handle our mortality witness to God's saving grace?

### **Truthful Self-Assessment** (pp. 29-30)

Invite class members to reflect silently about a time when someone has been brutally honest with them. After a few moments, ask: Why is it important to be honest with ourselves about the choices we make? Why do we take offense when others attempt to correct us? How can we be honest with someone without alienating them?

### **Thinking Ahead** (p. 30)

As you lead the discussion resulting from the following questions, be sensitive to class members who have recently experienced the death of a loved one. How does the church prepare people for death? How does the church prepare people to take care of the details that surround death? What might the church do to extend greater care to those who survive a loved one?

### **Jesus' Promise** (p. 30)

This portion of the crucifixion narrative reinforces Jesus' teachings about those who accept God later in their lives. When have you felt negatively about someone who had a "death bed conversion experience"? Why did you feel this way?

What was the attitude of Jesus toward the second criminal? When Jesus extends the man an invitation to Paradise, what do his words convey about forgiveness? How does the church sin? How are its sins forgiven?

### **God's Actions** (pp. 30-31)

Among the throngs of people present at Jesus' crucifixion were a number of his followers. In fact, they had been nearby throughout many of the proceedings that led to his crucifixion. What kept them from protesting the events of that week? What keeps us from speaking up when we witness an injustice? Of what injustices are you aware in your community? How will you address those issues?

God was also present, as evidenced by the three hours of darkness at midday and the torn veil in the temple. How do we see God's presence today? How does the church know that God is at work within it?

### **Closing**

Invite class members to contribute to a prayer that reflects their thoughts on suffering and death, beginning with the phrase, "Jesus suffered and died so that I could\_\_\_\_\_." Allow each person to offer an ending as they feel led.

# Resurrected to New Life

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To encounter the story of Jesus' resurrection as told in the Gospel of Luke; (2) to state the meaning of Jesus' resurrection for believers today; and (3) to live as if we really believe that new life is possible through the resurrected Christ.

**Background Scripture:** Luke 24:1-12; **Scripture Selection:** Luke 24:1-12

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Isaiah 25:6-9. *Hymns:* "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth," "The Day of Resurrection." *Devotional Reading:* 1 Corinthians 15:12-26.

## Advance Preparation

Read the account of Jesus' resurrection in the Gospels, with particular attention to Luke. Note differences and similarities in the four accounts.

Provide newsprint and markers, enough for four separate groups.

For Lesson 8, follow up during the week regarding a guest speaker from a faith-based community agency. If no guest is available, invite a class member to be prepared to talk about a faith-based ministry in which he or she is active.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 33)

Greet class members and visitors with the good news, "Christ is risen." Following announcements and prayer concerns, pray together the Lord's Prayer.

The resurrection of Jesus means the possibility of new life for all people. How can we experience the miracle of Jesus' resurrection in our daily lives? How can we help other people to experience this miracle as well?

## Life After Death (p. 33)

In the first century, women were not highly regarded, which makes the inclusion of this story in the biblical account somewhat remarkable. The women were simply doing what needed to be done, what was expected. Encourage class members to think of times when God has used everyday occurrences to reveal miracles. In what ways does the church recognize the role of women on the first resurrection morning? How does your congregation encourage women to use their talents to serve God? How might you broaden the scope of women's involvement?

## The Stone Has Been Rolled Away (pp. 33-34)

Suggest that class members imagine themselves in the position of the women who visited Jesus' tomb. What might you have been talking about as you walked together? What concerns would have been uppermost in your mind? What would you have thought when you found the stone rolled away and Jesus' body missing?

God met the women's needs without them even asking! When has God met your needs (individually or as a congregation) even before the need was voiced?

## Angelic Messengers (p. 34)

Angels have always had prominent roles amongst people of faith. Modern society seems to have a real fascination with angels and the involvement of angels in people's daily lives. When have you thought that you experienced the presence of an angel? In what way did the experience bring comfort?

### **Remembering What Jesus Said** (p. 34)

There have been numerous gags where a person is acting in an irrational way only to have someone slap him or her in an attempt to return the person to reality. The person would respond, “Thanks. I needed that.” How did the angels serve in this role for the women? How did the angels move the women from fear and uncertainty to faith that Jesus was alive? Who has helped you to move beyond seeming impossibilities to reality?

### **Telling the Story** (p. 35)

Divide the class into four groups. Assign each group to read one of the following passages: Matthew 28:1-5; Mark 16:1-18; Luke 24:1-19; and John 20:1-29. Give each group newsprint and markers. Ask them to read their assigned passage and answer the who, what, when, where, how, and why questions for that passage. Compare the accounts, looking for consistencies and differences.

How do these variations impact your acceptance of the resurrection? What does it take for your congregation to accept a new idea? What difference does faith in the resurrection make to someone who loses a loved one in death? How have you told the story of Jesus to people who at first seemed indifferent?

### **Idle Tales** (p. 35)

Invite class members to share briefly about a time when they doubted news that someone told them. Then ask: Why did you doubt the truthfulness of the message? How did you verify the accuracy? How can you help people to hear and believe the truth of the resurrection message? How can/does your life serve as a witness to the truth of the resurrection?

### **Really Hearing Jesus** (pp. 35-36)

Whisper a sentence to one person and ask that person to whisper it to the person on his or her left. Continue passing the message until several people have heard it. Then ask the last person who received the message to repeat it aloud. Compare the original message with what the last person heard. How does this game compare to our ability to hear and understand what Jesus is saying to us? How can the church help people to understand Jesus’ teachings? How does your congregation’s understanding of Jesus’ teachings influence its priorities for ministry, evangelism, discipleship, benevolence, and care for or expansion of its facilities?

### **Peter’s Inquiry** (p. 36)

All of us have experienced “eating crow” over a remark or action. Peter undoubtedly felt this way once he discovered the truth of the women’s message. Think for a moment about what caused Peter to believe that Jesus had risen. Then ask: What must we know about Jesus before we come to believe that he died and rose again? How does answering this help us witness to others?

### **Closing**

Invite one of the students to offer a closing prayer. Announce that next week a guest will be present to share information about a faith-based ministry.

Encourage participants to read an outside source about the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). This passage precedes the Background Scripture for the next lesson. According to Luke, it tells of Jesus’ first appearance after the resurrection.

# Witnesses to New Life

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To reflect on Luke's account of Jesus' commissioning of his disciples; (2) to identify ways that God has blessed us and to feel gratitude for those blessings; and (3) to give witness to others about the new life we have in Christ Jesus.

**Background Scripture:** Luke 24:36-53; **Scripture Selection:** Luke 24:44-53

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 133. *Hymns:* "Jesus Is All the World to Me," "Heavenly Sunlight," "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations." *Devotional Reading:* Acts 2:22-32.

## Advance Preparation

Read the Background Scripture in at least two different versions of the Bible. Using a version different from the one you normally read may provide a new insight into the passage.

Read the lesson in the student book, noting things to which you want to call attention.

Early in the week, contact your guest speaker with any last minute instructions.

Enlist two volunteers to present Luke 24:36-53 in a reader's theater format. One person should practice reading the narrative portion and the other person the words of Jesus. Having the readers wear simple robes, tunics, and sandals will enhance the dramatic effect.

Provide note cards and pens that class members can use to write letters. Visit the Missions Ministry Team website for a current list of Cumberland Presbyterians who are currently serving in various mission-related ministries (<http://www.cumberland.org/bom/globalmissions/globalmissions.htm>).

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 38)

Welcome everyone and take time for announcements and prayer concerns. Invite a volunteer to open the class time with prayer, remembering those concerns that were just mentioned. Introduce the guest speaker.

Have the volunteers present the reader's theater of Luke 24:36-53. What did you notice in the reading that you had never noticed before? What stands out most in the story?

## An Afternoon Walk with a Stranger (p. 38)

Begin by inviting the class to share the highpoints of their reading of Luke 24:13-35 (assigned last week). Luke tells this story as the first appearance of Jesus after the resurrection. Sometimes it is easier to talk with a stranger than with someone who will continue to be present in our lives. When are you likely to let your emotions show in the presence of strangers? What keeps you from being honest about the way you really feel?

## The Journey Back (pp. 38-39)

The two followers on the road to Emmaus didn't waste time as they hurried back to tell the eleven that they had seen Jesus. When has Jesus surprised you? How did you tell others about the experience?

How did Jesus' appearance strengthen and encourage his followers? When we make it a priority to encourage others, what are we likely to do? Ask participants to compose a letter of encouragement to a Christian worker or missionary of their choice. The addressee should be someone the class member knows or knows about. Provide envelopes and addresses so that participants may mail their letters.

## Imaginations Take Flight (p. 39)

Humans tend to believe what they can see. Suggest that class members imagine themselves in

the room with the disciples when Jesus appeared. Then ask: What might your reaction have been? How has fear of the unknown limited your ministry? that of the congregation? How can the church work to overcome such fear?

### **Speechless** (p. 39)

Invite students to think of times when they have experienced great anxiety. Let those who are willing share their responses to these questions: What enabled you to gain control over your emotions? How can you help others who are experiencing anxiety?

### **Sensitive to Their Hearts** (pp. 39-40)

It would be easy to condemn the disciples for their lack of understanding, but we know what happened! Yet, we can still become impatient with those who are slow to believe in Jesus' resurrection. When has God been patient with you?

### **Opening Their Minds** (p. 40)

Biblical illiteracy is rampant, even among many church-going people. How is your church helping to educate its members about the basic tenets of the Bible? How does the church help people to apply to life what they learn in Bible study? If you identify other educational needs, contact your session or the team responsible for Christian education in your congregation.

### **A New Responsibility** (p. 40)

Briefly tell the class about the organization the guest speaker represents. Ask the guest to describe how the resurrection of Jesus has shaped the faith-based ministry's mission. Allow time for questions.

### **Witnesses** (p. 41)

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is in the midst of a focus on evangelism, which is a command Jesus gave his disciples. What personalities or cultural expectations attempt to silence your Christian witness? How can we confront and overcome such opposition?

### **Empowered for Witness** (p. 41)

Have you ever been given a task, but no idea of how you were to accomplish it? That must be how the disciples felt as they heard Jesus tell them to be witnesses. After all, they weren't teachers, they didn't have an education. When have you felt inadequate for the task to which God has called you? How did God empower you for the task? In what ways is your congregation open to the leading and empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit?

### **The Ascension** (p. 41)

Reflect on the difference between this scene and the crucifixion. Even though they had heard Jesus' teachings and knew God's promises about a messiah, they did not understand. Now they do. In what areas of your faith journey has God given you understanding? How did you react? About what do you still wonder?

### **Closing**

Thank the guest speaker for his or her time and shared information.

Close with sentence prayers, inviting everyone to participate; anyone who prefers not to pray aloud may remain silent. Suggest that students include prayers for missionaries and other Christian witnesses.

# Bringing New Life to Those in Need

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To relate the stories of the miraculous healings of Aeneas and Tabitha; (2) to feel the power of Christ's presence in times of need; and (3) to share the story of Jesus that brings new life to all who believe.

**Background Scripture:** Acts 9:32-43; **Scripture Selection:** Acts 9:32-43

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 4. *Hymns:* "To God Be the Glory," "He Lives," "There Is Power in the Blood." *Devotional Reading:* John 14:8-14.

## Advance Preparation

This week's lesson is on seeking help in times of need and makes use of two related stories found in Acts 9:32-43. Read the Scripture Selection as well as the student book lesson.

Invite a medical professional and a pastoral care representative to form a panel for sharing with the class about healing, prayer, and death. If you are unable to arrange for a panel presentation, ask a class member to research the power of prayer in healthcare settings.

Next week begins a study of key passages from the Letter to the Ephesians. Here are two ideas to consider as you plan ahead: (1) Ask someone in the class who has adopted a child to talk about that process. Alternately, ask someone who was adopted speak about what it means to be adopted. (2) Have an attorney or realtor discuss what it means to have "earnest money" in certain business transactions.

Locate a map of Palestine in New Testament times. Display it in the class meeting area.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 43)

Introduce your guest panelists. Invite them to tell a little about themselves. Allow time for announcements and prayer concerns. Pray together, remembering any concerns mentioned.

Explore with the panel speakers the interrelationships of faith and healing. Where do we turn for help in times of physical illness and death?

If you don't have a panel, ask the above question and then have a report from the person who has researched the link between prayer and healthcare issues. Invite questions from the class. Ask the class at large: How have answers to prayer given you opportunities to witness to your faith?

## The Saints in Lydda (p. 43)

Identify the locations of Lydda and Joppa on a map. Note the relationship of the two faith communities. How does your congregation maintain relations with other Cumberland Presbyterian churches? How did these ties form? How do you assist one another? What ministries might you be able to support cooperatively?

## Searching for Those in Need (p. 44)

Hear a report from those who have done research on Aeneas. How do those in your congregation treat people who come looking for assistance? When are you most likely to help someone in need? When are you least likely to offer assistance? Identify those in your community who need assistance. How will you reach out to them in compassion? Plan and implement a way of ministering to those who need assistance. It could be as simple as calling a person who has recently lost a spouse.

## The Name of Jesus (p. 44)

At first glance, we see that Aeneas received physical healing. Yet we know that he was also made whole. What does being made whole mean to you? In what ways is your congregation whole (united)? In what ways is your congregation fragmented? What would bring greater life to your congregation?

**Witness Brings Converts** (pp. 44-45)

Many people today dismiss the idea of miracles. Why do you think this is the case? Then ask class members to respond to the statement: When a miracle occurs, there is no need for preaching! Do you agree or disagree? Why?

**Tabitha's Example** (p. 45)

Many churches throughout the world have Dorcas groups. The original one was founded in Douglas, Isle of Man, on December 1, 1834, as part of the community's thanksgiving for being spared from an outbreak of cholera. The clothing and bedding of the poorer families was destroyed as part of the effort to prevent the disease. Today there are Dorcas groups around the world, providing clothing and other things for those who are in need.

What would be required to start a Dorcas ministry in your congregation? Who would be the intended beneficiaries of such outreach? What would be the first step in organizing such a ministry?

**Putting Their Faith to Work** (p. 45)

How do you react when someone asks you to pray for him or her? How faithful are you in remembering to do so? In what ways do you follow up on these requests?

Intercessory prayer is a powerful tool. Join with denominational staff and others throughout the church on Tuesday mornings at 8:30 for a time of intercessory prayer. If you have needs or concerns that you would like to have included, contact Abbay Milnor at [arm@cumberland.org](mailto:arm@cumberland.org) or call 901-276-4572, ext. 217.

**Weeping Before the Joy** (p. 45)

How has the Lord comforted the congregation in the unexpected passing of a much loved member? How were you able to handle the loss?

Challenge class members to express their genuine appreciation to someone this week.

**Following the Lord's Example** (p. 46)

Peter isn't the only disciple who witnessed miracles. Look up the following passages related to the miracles associated with Paul: Acts 9:17-18; 13:11; 14:10; 16:18, 25-26; 19:13-16; 20:20; 28:5. What do you notice about these miracles? How were they alike? How were they different?

**The Healer** (p. 46)

Recently word spread to thousands of people regarding the need to pray for healing for a minister who had been in a near-fatal car accident. The power of prayer has certainly been evident through his miraculous recovery. How have you been aware of God's healing power? Even if God does not physically heal a person, God can still heal the spirit and give the person and his or her family the ability to accept the situation.

**More Souls into the Kingdom** (p. 46)

How is your congregation reaching souls outside of your community with the gospel? In what ways does your congregation emphasize the role of missions? Identify one tangible way the congregation can establish deeper bonds with non-English speaking congregations within the United States?

**Closing**

In groups of three or four, pray for one another.

Ask the students to read the Letter to the Ephesians and bring any questions they might have related to Lesson 10.

# New Family in Christ

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review Paul's words of thanksgiving for the family of faith; (2) to recognize our blessings and responsibilities as God's children; and (3) to live in harmony with all God's children.

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 1:3-14; **Scripture Selection:** Ephesians 1:3-14

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Openings Sentences:* 1 John 3:16-24. *Hymns:* "For the Beauty of the Earth," "My Savior's Love," "He Lifted Me." *Devotional Reading:* Exodus 19:1-8.

## Advance Preparation

This lesson begins the final unit in the spring quarter. The primary resource will be the Letter to the Ephesians. We will have read the entire letter by the time we complete Lesson 14. It is a relatively short letter, but it has a great deal of information and inspiration. Suggestion: reading aloud may make some difficult passages clearer.

Read the lesson in the student book and the leader guide. Highlight things you want to be sure to include as you teach. Write questions or other ideas in the margins.

Follow up with the guest speaker if you have invited one for the session.

There is a brief discussion on predestination in the lesson. If you want to do some research on this topic, the *Confession of Faith* is a good place to begin.

Bring a shoebox with a lid. Label the top of the box "Future Blessings." Have enough index cards for each class participant to have two each.

For this series of lessons, secure a Bible dictionary, a concordance, and a few copies of the *Confession of Faith*. Display a map of Paul's missionary journeys throughout this unit.

Provide newsprint and markers and access to an erasable board.

For the lesson next week, ask students to bring magazines to use in a montage.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 48)

As you begin the class, make sure everyone feels welcome and comfortable. Take time for announcements and prayer concerns. Have a volunteer open the class time with prayer.

This week's lesson moves in the direction of the spiritual family, dealing with the role of the Trinity in bringing sinners back into relationship with God. Briefly review the introductory material presented in the student book, or invite volunteers to read it aloud.

## The Greeting (p. 48)

Encourage class members to tell briefly about various greetings they have received. Maybe someone who answered a business phone without identifying himself or herself. Maybe when visiting a church or attending a group function. Then ask: How does your church help the stranger feel welcome? What might cause long-time members to be reluctant to embrace new people? Bear in mind that we live in a highly mobile society in which many people don't form lifelong ties.

## Spiritual Blessings (p. 48)

Divide the class into two or more groups. Try to keep the groups to six or fewer people. Have some groups describe their quality of life before they entered the family of God. Have other groups describe their quality of life within the family of God. Ask them to record their descriptions on newsprint. Ask each group to report its description, followed by a general discussion.

### **The Need for Community** (p. 49)

In today's society, many people are separated from their natural families as a result of physical distance or other issues. Yet, most people crave "family relationships." How can the church provide opportunities for people to develop positive "family-type" associations? As the students respond, make a list on newsprint or an erasable board. In what ways can the church provide adults a more accepting spiritual family?

### **God Takes the First Step** (pp. 49-50)

How do individuals come into the family of God? What are some barriers to inclusion? How does reconciliation with God provide an example of how to reconcile with others?

### **Destined for Adoption** (p. 50)

Hear a report or speaker about a personal adoption experience. Talk together about society's perceptions of adoption as well as what the group feels about either adopting or being adopted. Given all the children who need loving homes, why do you think more people don't consider adoption? What are some of the barriers to adoption? How does it make you feel to know that God has adopted you?

### **Predestination** (pp. 50-51)

Share selected paragraphs from section 4.0 of the *Confession of Faith* ("God Acts Through the Holy Spirit"). In what ways is the church in a pluralistic society challenged by the "whosoever will" approach to salvation?

### **Benefits of Being in Christ** (p. 51)

Give each participant two lined index cards. Encourage them to list their personal blessings on one card and put prayer requests on the second card. Place the prayer requests, which may be unsigned, in the "future blessing" box. Ask the group to be in prayer over these requests during the next week.

### **The Inheritance** (pp. 51-52)

Invite class members to tell what they think of when they hear the word *inheritance*. If these terms are not mentioned, you may want to suggest them: unearned or undeserved, gift, something of value. Then compare their comments with the inheritance Paul describes in the scripture passage. What are the similarities? differences?

### **God's Pledge** (p. 52)

Ask someone to tell about a personal experience in the use of earnest money. Following those comments, ask the students how the terms *earnest* or *pledge* help them better understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation experience. How does this explanation change the way you have previously understood the role of the Holy Spirit?

### **Closing**

Close with prayer, remember to pray for the concerns expressed in the "future blessing" box.

Encourage class members to read the lesson in the student book. Ask them to bring old magazines for the next class session. Suggest that each person bring an object from nature that represents the new life that spring brings to the world.

# New Life in Christ

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To investigate Paul's words about the lifelong benefits that Christ offers; (2) to recognize that salvation is the gift of our gracious God; and (3) to give thanks for the bountiful benefits of God's gracious salvation.

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 2:1-10; **Scripture Selection:** Ephesians 2:1-10

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* 1 John 4:7-13. *Hymns:* "Grace Greater Than Our Sin," "No Other Plea," "Lead Me to Calvary." *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 86:1-13.

## Advance Preparation

Pray for class members individually, remembering the "future blessing" box from the last session.

Spend time in preparation of the lesson, read the background scripture, the student book, and the teaching suggestions provided here.

If you plan to have the class create a montage, provide glue sticks, scissors, and old magazines. (See "In Need of Deliverance" below.)

Have available small pieces of paper and pencils for class participants.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 54)

As you welcome class members and visitors, suggest that they read the Scripture Selection before the opening prayer. Invite a volunteer to lead the group in prayer.

Either read or briefly summarize the story of Naomi and Ruth that is recounted in the opening section of the student book lesson. Then ask: How does this story inspire you? Why might it make others jealous? When has your care and concern for someone else become a blessing?

## In Need of Deliverance (pp. 54-55)

Create a montage to illustrate "living in the passions of the flesh" using images clipped from magazines. Ask each person to contribute one or two images to the montage. Encourage conversation about what class members chose to include on the montage and why.

Then talk together about why humans so often pursue a lifestyle that alienates them from God. Suggest class members silently consider such times in their own lives and how they can avoid those types of situations from arising in the future.

## The Mercy of God (p. 55)

While the accounts of dramatic conversion experiences touch many people, such experiences are not the norm for most Christians, especially for those who grew up in the church. In what ways did the faith community of your youth invite you into relationship with Christ? What differences did you notice in your life after you accepted Christ? How does your congregation encourage people to commit their lives more fully to Christ?

## Dead in Trespasses (pp. 55-56)

What does it mean to be born again? Invite the class members to draw on their personal experiences in this discussion. If the group is slow to respond, read John 3:1-8 and/or Romans 10:8-17.

Adults tend to think of themselves as self-sufficient. How does it make you feel to realize that you are unable to save yourself? that you are dependent on God and God's grace?

### **A New Position** (pp. 56-57)

Suggest that class members think about a time when they have been in a group and had to sit with people whom they did not know. Compare that experience to joining a friend who has saved a seat for you. What might your friend have had to do to secure a place for you? How do you feel knowing that your friend went to extra effort on your behalf? How do you feel when you realize what Christ sacrificed so that you could be seated with him in heaven?

### **A Heavenly Perspective** (p. 57)

Provide small pieces of paper and pencils to participants. Ask them to record some of their beliefs about heaven, writing one belief per piece of paper. Place all of the submissions on a table.

Mix up the slips of paper. Divide the group into two teams. Have a member of each team choose one slip of paper and then act out (without using words) what has been written on the paper. The other team will try to guess what he or she is portraying. If a player draws a term or phrase that has been used already, encourage the player to choose another piece of paper.

Depending on how long the game lasts, discuss two or three of the terms or phrases. Are these beliefs grounded in Scripture, or do they reflect popular culture?

### **Unmerited Favor** (p. 57)

Encourage class members to tell of a time they received a gift that was given with such love and care that they were overwhelmed. A friend created a mini-scrapbook for me that started with a picture of me as an infant and commemorated our times together for fifty years. There was nothing I could have given her that would have been of greater value than her love and thoughtfulness had been to me. What can we bring to God that is of greatest value? How do people try to gain God's favor without trusting in Jesus?

### **Created in Christ for Good Works** (p. 58)

Ask students to name types of work they have done for pay. What pattern stands out? Then ask them to mention the ministries in which they were engaged during those same years. How did the spiritual activities enrich their lives? How did their work keep their spiritual lives in the reality zone?

How can the church become a better source of grace? What are the risks in doing so? How will you extend grace to someone this week?

This section in the student book closes with "Grace, Enough for Me," a hymn that you may use as a litany. You may want to close the lesson with this litany.

### **Closing**

Challenge each student to speak with someone about the grace of God before the next class meeting.

In advance of the next session, encourage class participants to read section 1.00, "God Speaks to the Human Family," in the *Confession of Faith*. An alternate assignment might be to look up the meaning of *revelation* in a Bible dictionary.

# New Revelation in Christ

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To discern Paul's understanding of God's self-revelation in Jesus and the role it plays in salvation history; (2) to acknowledge and appreciate the revelation of Jesus to the world; and (3) to make Jesus known to others outside our comfort zone.

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 3:1-13; **Scripture Selection:** Ephesians 3:1-13

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Acts 10:44-48. *Hymns:* "All Creatures of Our God and King," "Nothing Between," "Jesus Saves." *Devotional Reading:* Isaiah 40:1-11.

## Advance Preparation

This lesson is about God's desire to bring all people into God's family. It focuses on Paul's belief that the revelation of Jesus Christ unlocks the mystery of God's eternal and all-inclusive plan for salvation. Spend time reading the Scripture Selection for this lesson. Read it in a version other than the one you normally use. Read these teaching suggestions along with the student book lesson. Highlight things that you specifically want to include in your teaching plan.

Call attention to the "future blessing" box, providing an opportunity for participants to add a prayer request and to notify others when someone has done so.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 60)

Welcome class members and visitors. Allow time for announcements and prayer concerns. Invite a volunteer to open with prayer. Remember to include the "future blessing" box requests in the prayer.

Briefly tell class members about Paul Harvey, a radio personality who may be best known for a segment he does called, "The Rest of the Story." Harvey will tell a little-known story about someone or an event but not reveal the identity until the end—keeping his listeners in suspense. Explain that today's lesson is similar in that Christ had been a mystery to previous generations, but understanding has recently been revealed.

## Commissioned to Testify (p. 60)

Paul describes himself as a prisoner. Invite class members to mention people who have been imprisoned for their faith and/or the actions they took as a result of their faith. Then ask them to ponder silently what they might do if faced with a situation where acting on their faith could cause them to be imprisoned.

Paul refers to the commission that was given him for the Gentiles. Paul had been trained as a Pharisee, someone who would have despised Gentiles. How did Paul feel about this call?

Each of us has a commission from Jesus Christ. When has that commission directed you to reach out to a person or group whom you disliked or with whom you were uncomfortable? How did you respond to that commission? How will recalling Paul's example affect your responses in the future?

## Doctrine of Revelation (p. 60)

Ask those who researched *revelation* in the *Confession of Faith* to share some of the ideas they discovered. In what way does the doctrine of revelation require Christians to apply themselves to diligent study? What help does the believer have? How has your understanding of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit changed?

**Mystery Revealed** (pp. 60-61)

Paul devoted his life to bringing others to Christ, even suffering imprisonment. How do you help to explain the mystery of Christ and salvation to others? What would enable you to do so more effectively? How do the ministries, departments, and committees of your congregation work together to reveal the mystery of salvation?

**What We Know Now** (p. 61)

Discuss the statement: The cross of Jesus Christ levels the spiritual playing field for all humanity. In what ways do you agree with the statement? In what ways do you disagree? Why?

**What Gentiles Receive** (pp. 61-62)

It must have been difficult for Paul to accept that God's love and salvation was for everyone. How (or when) does the church of today fail to understand this same message? How does your congregation's understanding of this message affect the choices it makes regarding local benevolence, outreach, and missions giving? What programs, prayer meetings, or fundraisers has your class sponsored to show your support for reaching the unsaved with the message of Christ?

**A Servant's Work** (p. 62)

Contemporary culture has given a less than favorable perspective to someone who is a servant. Yet Christ calls us to serve others. Who are the servants in your congregation? How does grace shape the interpersonal relationships of those people? How do you treat those who serve you?

**It's No Secret** (pp. 62-63)

It is not uncommon for people to turn away from the message of the church due to our human failings, especially when there is a lack of unity within the body of Christ. How does your congregation deal with disagreement? How do you deal with disagreement within your family? your business dealings? How do your actions affect your Christian witness?

Take a serious look at your congregation and its ministries. To what groups of people do you fail to offer the message of salvation? How does your church determine whether to continue or end a particular outreach or missions commitment? What is your expectation in outreach?

**Good News for All** (p. 63)

Suggest that class members recall a time when they shared their faith with someone. How did you approach the person? Why did you choose to share the message of God's grace with that particular person? The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is in the midst of an emphasis on evangelism. Talk with the pastor and session to see how your congregation can be more intentional in its evangelistic efforts.

**Not Losing Heart** (p. 63)

Very seldom will the initial first contact with a non-believer lead that person to accept the grace God extends to us. Yet Paul encourages us to continue despite the challenges we may face. What challenges do you face in sharing the message of God's saving grace?

**Closing**

Lead the class in a closing prayer. Challenge the students to share their faith with at least one person during the coming week.

# New Life in the Home

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine Paul's teaching about life in the Christian household; (2) to explore the meaning of being subject to others in the family; and (3) to work toward healing conflict in our homes and families.

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 5:1–6:4; **Scripture Selection:** Ephesians 5:21–6:4

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 1. *Hymns:* "When Morning Gilds the Skies," "Only Trust Him," "Happy the Home When God Is There." *Devotional Reading:* 1 Corinthians 1:4-17.

## Advance Preparation

Read the following lesson as well as the one in the student book. Read the Background Scripture passage in a couple of different translations, noting the differences.

Provide a Bible dictionary, concordance, and topical Bible for use by class members.

Label a sheet of newsprint "Christ and the Church." Label a second sheet "Husbands and Wives." Post the newsprint in your learning area and provide markers. Or make two columns on an erasable board with the same headings. You will need newsprint or an erasable board for another activity as well.

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 65)

Follow the class's customary routine, welcoming everyone and introducing any visitors. Open with prayer, remembering the requests that have been placed in the "future blessings" box. If any class members have been absent for more than two weeks, ask for a volunteer to get in touch with them.

Note that today's topic is harmony in the home. This lesson may excite or anger some people, as it deals with relationships that are generally very private. Problems between spouses are more apt to be observed than to be confessed. Most adults desire a home in which love and harmony reign, but they need help to determine what will give their unique family strength and mutual respect.

There may well be people in your class who have been married for a long time. There may be those in the class who have been divorced a good part of their adult life. Others may have sworn off any type of relationship because they experienced abuse as a child. If people want to opt out of an activity, don't pressure them to join in.

Using the pre-labeled newsprint ("Christ and the Church" and "Husbands and Wives"), ask class members to list parallel characteristics of these two relationships. Let the students take turns using a marker to record their responses. Read together the Scripture Selection as printed in the student book. Then make revisions and additions to the lists.

How is looking at biblical families reassuring? How should the home of a Christian differ from that of a non-believer? Why? What is the church's responsibility to families? What are some family needs you can identify? How is your congregation addressing these needs?

## Be Subject to One Another (pp. 65-66)

Write the words *submission* and *authority* on an erasable board or newsprint. Discuss ways in which these words are positive, negative, and neutral in today's society. How do our culture and our faith affect our attitude toward submission to authority? How does your understanding of what it means to be in submission to one another affect your feelings about this passage?

### **Subject to the Lord** (pp. 66-67)

Much time has been spent debating these verses. Some people believe that men are to be the undisputed head of the household. Those same people often believe that women should not serve in leadership roles in the church. In what ways does your congregation show support and care for its members? How does it nurture people and help them develop and use their gifts?

### **Love Your Wives** (p. 67)

Paul talks about the importance of sacrificial love in marital/family relationships. What comes to mind when you hear the term *sacrificial love*? Invite class members to name some people who have shown sacrificial love. How does such love relate to the church? to the world? to your family? How can the church model sacrificial love? How can we help others to embrace the tenets of sacrificial love?

### **Children, Are You Listening?** (pp. 67-68)

Brainstorm a list of “Biggest Mistakes Parents Make.” How could parents avoid many of these mistakes by following the guidelines found in today’s Scripture Selection? Use a concordance or topical Bible to find related texts. What do those texts add to Paul’s advice to the Ephesians?

Reports of child abuse never cease to amaze and horrify me. Some parents take to extremes the biblical mandate that children are to obey and respect their parents. Child abuse affects people of all economic and racial backgrounds. What is your congregation doing to address child abuse in your community? Consider volunteering with a local shelter for victims of abuse or the department of human services in your area.

Due to our mobile society, many children do not have frequent access to their extended family. Often the church fills this void. Some churches and schools “adopt grandparents” by pairing a child with one or more older adults. Both the child and adult benefit from the relationship. How might this idea be implemented in your area?

### **A Special Word to Fathers** (p. 68)

It is frequently said that children do not come with printed instructions! Parents often find themselves at a loss as to how to raise their children to be respectful and constructive citizens. The Cumberland Presbyterian Children’s Home offers Love and Logic Parenting classes. They will send a staff person to your area to lead such classes. For more information, call (940) 382-5112 x 252 or e-mail [cpch@cpch.org](mailto:cpch@cpch.org).

You have probably heard the expression, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In what ways does your congregation serve as part of that village? What areas of need are you failing to address?

Spend a few moments brainstorming how your congregation can reach out to families. Choose one or two ideas to present to the session.

### **Closing**

Close the session with prayer for the families represented in your class, in your church, and in the community at large.

# Equipped for New Life

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To investigate the metaphorical armor needed for life as a Christian; (2) to equip ourselves for a life of spiritual warfare; and (3) to fight spiritual battles bravely and confidently as they arise.

**Background Scripture:** Ephesians 6:10-18; **Scripture Selection:** Ephesians 6:10-18

**Suggestions for Worship:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 97:10-12. *Hymns:* “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “Soldiers of Christ, Arise.” *Devotional Reading:* Luke 11:14-23.

## Advance Preparation

Read the Devotional Reading. Visit the Voice of the Martyrs website to learn about the opposition Christians face today as they live out their witness in nations hostile to the gospel.

Spend time with the Scripture Selection for this lesson. Reading it in a modern version, such as *The Message*, may provide a different insight.

Sketch on a chalkboard or newsprint the outline of a human body. Clothe it with the garments and equipment mentioned in the Scripture Selection. Plan to use it as a visual aid throughout the class.

Set aside a time this week for personal prayer and to pray for the students. At the conclusion of this lesson, pray for each person who is a part of the class, including any who are inactive.

At the end of this unit, engage in a personal evaluation of your teaching. What activities are working? What activities would you like to use again? How can you improve your leadership of the class in the coming months?

## Welcome/Introduction (p. 70)

Welcome class members and visitors. Allow time for prayer requests and announcements. Follow up with the “future blessings” box by asking if anyone has received an answer to something they placed in the box during a previous session. Invite a volunteer to open class with prayer.

Have class members tell something that tempts them and how they deal with the temptation. As always, do not pressure anyone to share. Then explain that this lesson deals with spiritual battles and temptations and how we can face them successfully. Although images of war trouble some Christians, Paul’s metaphor can help raise our awareness of evil in the world and move us away from complacency to an aggressive struggle for the good and right.

## Strong in the Lord (p. 70)

Taking a stand against an injustice can be difficult, uncomfortable, and even frightening. Yet God calls us to such action. When have you individually or as part of a group taken a stand for justice and righteousness? Describe the situation. What issue was at stake? Who opposed your efforts? How were you able to take a stand in a way that honored God? What did you learn that will help you to be more effective the next time you take a stand?

## The Whole Armor of God (pp. 70-71)

Invite class members to comment as to what images they associate with the word *armor*. Talk together about why Paul may have used this term in the Scripture Selection. Then ask: How does it make you feel to know that God has provided a means of protection for you? In what ways do you use this protection?

## **Our Struggle** (p. 71)

If you visited the Voice of the Martyrs website, share one or more of the stories you found there. Or, share another situation about which you are aware that relates a violent attack or insidious plot against Christians. How does your church respond to such reports? Why is it easy to remain silent? What is wrong about trying to keep the peace? How do you respond individually to such crises?

In what ways are consumerism, competition between churches, elitism, and the demand for personal rights evil forces in our society? How is the church affected by racial and cultural barriers that people want left in place? What are some effective strategies that we can use in opposing them?

## **Take Up the Whole Armor of God** (pp. 71-72)

Refer to the sketch of a human body on the chalkboard or newsprint. Suggest that class members think about the things they did to get ready to leave their homes this morning. How did they “take up the whole armor of God”? What are the key components of a Christian’s spiritual armor? Why might that armor be described as “custom fit”?

Brainstorm some ways believers can improve in each area the armor metaphor suggests (truth, righteousness, etc.). Ask the students to suggest ways they can help others grow in these areas. How do these attributes help us to direct our efforts toward peacemaking?

In what ways do Christians set themselves up for the temptation to sin? What role does unconfessed sin play in such temptations? How can seeking to live in the will of God make one a target for evil threats from the temptor? How do you withstand such threats?

## **Moving Forward** (pp. 72-73)

Part of being a Christian is the responsibility of sharing our faith. Faith allows us to move forward in all areas of our Christian journey. Invite class members to share things that may hinder Christians from sharing their faith.

Fear can be one of the biggest road blocks for a Christian. What role does fear play in keeping a church from advancing into unfamiliar areas of ministry? How can pastoral leadership equip church members to move forward? What ministries in your church seem vulnerable to the influences of evil?

## **Pray in the Spirit** (p. 73)

Plan a prayer event (for example, a prayer walk, a concert of prayer, a prayer meeting) that will involve the class or congregation in supplications for all the saints (verse 18). Provide specific information about people (without breaching anyone’s privacy) for whom you can pray. Include missionaries, church leaders (paid and volunteer), the sick, young people, people in careers in which their faith might be especially challenged, and so forth.

Investigate methods of prayer as well. Prayer doesn’t have to be spent sitting with head bowed in a quiet place. The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing. How can you fulfill this responsibility? How do you listen for God to speak to you during your prayer time?

## **Closing**

Lead the class in prayer, providing an opportunity for three or more persons to lift up a short prayer.

As you dismiss the class thank the group for their faithful participation throughout the quarter. Distribute copies of the summer issue of *Encounter* student book.

## Evaluation

Help to improve the usefulness of this leader's guide by answering the following questions and returning this form, along with your comments and suggestions, to the address listed on the reverse side of this page.

**To what extent was this leader's guide helpful to you?** (Circle the appropriate number. "1" = Not at All and "7" = Extremely.)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

**What are the two most helpful things in this guide?**

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**If you could change one thing about the leader's guide, what would it be?**

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