



WEEKLY

BIBLE STUDIES

- LESSON 1 ■ "TABERNACLES—GOD WITH US!"**
- LESSON 2 ■ "A GREAT MYSTERY—PART 1"**
- LESSON 3 ■ "A GREAT MYSTERY—PART 2"**
- LESSON 4 ■ "A GREAT MYSTERY—PART 3"**
- LESSON 5 ■ "HOORAY FOR TRIALS! – PART 1"**
- LESSON 6 ■ "HOORAY FOR TRIALS! – PART 2"**
- LESSON 7 ■ "IMPROVING THE GOSPEL"**
- LESSON 8 ■ "LAUGHTER—GOD'S PRESCRIPTION"**
- LESSON 9 ■ "LOOKING FORWARD"**
- LESSON 10 ■ "LOOKING BACKWARD"**
- LESSON 11 ■ "LOOKING UPWARD"**
- LESSON 12 ■ "LOOKING INWARD"**
- LESSON 13 ■ "LOOKING OUTWARD"**

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“TABERNACLES—GOD WITH US!”

Lesson 1 ■ For week ending October 3, 2020

Today is the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast is a wonderful time to reflect on the plan of God for mankind. It was during the season of Tabernacles that Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh—He literally “tabernacled” with His creation some 2,000 years ago. It is also the time when The Church of God believes that Jesus Christ will return to this earth to be forever reunited with His people. Tabernacles is a time of great celebration for God’s people!

KEY TEXT: “...the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels...The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 13:39b,41).

1. The feasts of the Lord are special times of interaction with Yahweh God.

- » God is the author of the Feast of Tabernacles.
- » According to Leviticus 23:33-37, Tabernacles is a 8-day yearly celebration which takes place in the seventh month of the Jewish Calendar. This corresponds with our months of September/October.
- » Note that verse 35 refers to the feast as a “holy convocation.”
- » In the Old Testament economy, it was a time to celebrate the harvest. The Israelites were commanded to “dwell in booths for seven days” to remind them of their 40 years in the wilderness when God delivered them from Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-44).
- » Discuss the parallels of how Moses (a savior and type of Jesus—Acts 3:22) delivered them from Egypt (a type of sin) and brought them to the Promised Land (a type of the Millennial Reign with Christ).

2. It was during the season of Tabernacles (Harvest), that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin and dwelt among men.

- » The Prophet Isaiah prophesied about this monumental event in Isaiah 9:1-7, some 730 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem.
- » Verse 3 defines the time/season that Christ would be born.
- » Verses 6 identifies all of the titles and roles that Jesus Christ plays in our lives.
- » The Apostle John tells us exactly what happened when Jesus was born. Read John 1:14.
- » The word *dwelt* comes from the Greek word *skenoō* (skay-no'-o) which means: *to tent* or *encamp*, that is, (figuratively) to *occupy* (as a mansion) or (specifically) to *reside* (as God did in the Tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion): - dwell.
- » Discuss the parallels of how Jesus (our Savior) delivered us from sin and death through the Cross of Calvary (Hebrews 7:22-28), thus purchasing Eternal Life for us (John 10:27,28).

3. It is in the season of Tabernacles/Harvest that Jesus Christ will return to this earth to rule and reign for 1,000 years.

- » The return of Jesus is a carefully orchestrated plan which will change the lives of every person on this planet. It is when the world will be “harvested” at the end of the age (Matthew 13:38,39).
- » First, the wicked will be judged (Matthew 13:30,40-42). This is the time of the Wrath Dispensation when God’s judgment is poured out on the earth for 3½ years (Revelation 11:3-6).
- » Second, Jesus will return at the 7th Trump on a white horse to judge the nations (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 11:15; 19:11-16; Matthew 25:31,32).
- » Third, Jesus will rule and reign for 1,000 years with His Bride by His side (Revelation 19:6-8; 20:4; Matthew 13:43).

4. Tabernacles is a forever feast. We will continue to celebrate it during Christ’s 1,000 reign on this earth.

- » Read Zechariah 14:16-19. Let’s celebrate the life-changing events that happen during Tabernacles!

“A GREAT MYSTERY – Part 1”

Lesson 2 ■ For week ending October 10, 2020

The Bible tells us emphatically that God’s ways are higher than ours. He is the One who knows everything—not us! One of the greatest mysteries of the Bible involves everyone on the earth. It is a mystery that still baffles some. When we come to understand that God knows the beginning from the end, we can watch in amazement as His master plan is fulfilled through the annals of time.

KEY TEXT: *“Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 3:5).*

1. The Apostle Paul writes about a mystery in Ephesians 3. He tells us that this mystery was kept a “secret” until a specified time in history.

- » Read Ephesians 3:1-5.
- » It’s important that we, as students of the Bible, realize that God has a master plan. God has a specific timetable that has been preordained before the creation of mankind.
- » Read Ephesians 3:6. What is this mystery that God kept hidden for some 4,000 years? It is that Jews and Gentiles—the only 2 divisions that God recognizes amongst His creation—are fellow heirs and partakers of God’s promise of salvation through Jesus Christ.

2. First, we must acknowledge that this apparent “about face” concerning the fate of Gentiles, was world changing.

- » Consider the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well. The interaction between Jesus and the Samaritan woman illustrated the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles at that time.
- » Read John 4:4-9. The Samaritan woman was shocked that Jesus was interacting with her.
- » Why did Jesus not share the Gospel with the Gentiles (as a nation)? Read Matthew 10:5-7.
- » The truth of the matter is that it was not yet *time* in God’s master plan for salvation to be offered to the Gentiles as a whole. NOTE: Individual Gentiles could be saved—remember the example of the Samaritan woman—but the Gentile nation as whole did not have access to salvation.

3. Second, everything that Jesus did was governed by prophecy. He was foreordained to do specific things at specific times.

- » Read Revelation 19:10. Discuss the phrase, *“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”*
- » It is mandatory for us to understand that everything Jesus did during His 33 ½ years here on earth, was foreordained by Bible prophecy. That was how Jesus was identified and recognized as the promised Messiah.
- » Jesus, Himself, made this clear when He said, *“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).*

4. Third, did God have a change of heart regarding the Gentiles after the Jews rejected Him?

- » Absolutely not! It has always been God’s plan to extend salvation to all people (II Peter 3:9).
- » Jesus explains the master plan of God in one concise statement that appears as a riddle of sorts found in Matthew 20:16.
- » Here’s God’s master plan in action. In the beginning, God chose a Gentile man named Abram—later changed to Abraham. He is considered the father of our faith (Genesis 12:1-3). God promised him a son—Isaac (Genesis 17:6,7,16-19).
- » Ishmael, Abraham’s son by Hagar, was born first and he represents all Gentiles. Isaac, who was the son of promise, was born last and he represents the Jews. So, when Jesus said that the first shall be last, He was saying that the Gentiles (who were born first) would receive salvation *LAST*. And the Jews, who were born last, would receive salvation *FIRST*.
- » That’s why Jesus only ministered to the Jews when He came to earth. He was bound by prophecy!

“A GREAT MYSTERY – Part 2”

Lesson 3 ■ For week ending October 17, 2020

Last week we established that God has a master plan for mankind on this earth. Consider Isaiah 46:10, *“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.’”* We also established that everything Jesus did was governed by Bible prophecy. Today we will continue to study God’s plan for Jews and Gentiles.

KEY TEXT: “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Ephesians 2:14).

1. In Ephesians 3:1-6, the Apostle Paul dropped a bombshell on the Early Church—which consisted mainly of Jews.

- » When Paul revealed that the Gentiles would be follow heirs with the Jews, this revelation was met with scepticism and outright rejection by the Jewish believers of that day.
- » Some may ask: “Why would God *hide* the fact that salvation would be eventually open to the Gentiles?”
- » Paul explains why in Ephesians 3:8-12. All of the promises of God are contained in Jesus Christ, Yahshua, the only-begotten Son of God.
- » It has always been all about Jesus.

2. In Genesis 3:15, we see the first prophetic statement regarding a Messiah who would one day bruise the heel of Satan’s kingdom on this earth.

- » When Adam and Eve sinned and were evicted from paradise to toil the cursed ground, God did not forsake them. Even in their punishment, God promised them that help would come in the form of His Son, Jesus (Revelation 13:8). So, right from the beginning of mankind, it has always been about Jesus.
- » Even when God made a covenant with Abraham—and subsequently the Jewish nation in the Old Testament—He included Jesus in the plan.
- » Genesis 13:15, *“For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy **seed** for ever.”*
- » Now read Galatians 3:16, *“Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, **“And to your Seed,” who is Christ.**”*

3. What then was the purpose of the Law in the Old Testament?

- » Paul tells us the purpose of the Law in Galatians 3:19-25.
- » One thing that the Law did was show us that we cannot make it without help from God Almighty! Consider the words of Peter found in Acts 15:10.
- » This was the discussion found in Acts 15 when the Early Church met at the Jerusalem Council to discuss how the Gentiles should be taught regarding salvation.
- » Read Acts 15:6-20.

4. It was at Calvary that the wall of separation between the Jews and Gentiles was dismantled.

- » When Jesus died on the cross, something happened in the Temple that was symbolic to all believers. Read Matthew 27:51.
- » Read Ephesians 2:1-18. The Gentiles, who were dead in their trespasses and sins, were made ALIVE through Jesus Christ. Thank you Jesus!

"A GREAT MYSTERY – Part 3"

Lesson 4 ■ For week ending October 24, 2020

For the past two weeks we have established the fact that the Jews and Gentiles are now fellow heirs together with Christ. What we haven't established is *exactly what that means*. Today we will look at what we as Gentiles are heirs to. TELL YOUR NEIGHBOR: "We've got it made!"

KEY TEXT: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26).

1. First, we must establish that as Gentiles, we were foreigners and aliens from God.

- » Paul talks about what we used to be in Ephesians 2:1-3.
- » He continues his discourse in Ephesians 2:11-13.
- » What was it that brought us near to God?

2. When we as Gentiles became fellow heirs, we are now recipients of the blessings that God promised to the Jews.

- » In Exodus 18:5,6, we find the original covenant God made with the nation of Israel. Discuss the promises that this covenant extended first to the Jews—and now to us as Gentiles.
- » While God offers salvation to everyone (God's Kingdom), He wants to have a special relationship with a group of believers (His Bride).
- » This is exemplified in the Old Testament with the example of the nation of Israel. After the reign of King Solomon, the nation was divided into 2 parts: Israel—which consisted of 10 tribes—was referred to as God's Kingdom or dominion, while Judah—which consisted of 2 tribes—was referred to as God's sanctuary. Read Psalm 114:2.

3. As Gentiles, we now have access to a better covenant than the Jews did in the Old Testament.

- » In the Old Testament, it was all about the flesh—the "natural". Read I Corinthians 15:46.
- » All of the sacrifices in the Old Testament—in the "natural"—were only a type and shadow of the one true sacrifice to come (Revelation 13:8; I Peter 1:20). In fact, Hebrews 10:4 tells us, "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.*"
- » Instead of trusting in the works of our flesh to make us righteous, we now trust in the atoning work of Jesus Christ as the eternal sacrifice that takes away the sins of man and makes us righteous before God (Romans 3:21-26).
- » Read Hebrews 9:11-15. Has your conscience been cleansed today?
- » What should our conduct be like today? Read I Peter 1:13-21.

4. The Church of God does not believe in "replacement theology" where the Gentiles replace the Jews. The Church of God believes that Gentiles and Jews are now joint heirs together.

- » In the Old Testament, God dwelt exclusively with Israel. Now, Gentiles are welcome in that household. Read Ephesians 2:19-22.
- » God has a great plan for all of us. Read Ephesians 2:4-10.
- » God's plan is to present to Himself a Bride—a people consisting of Jews and Gentiles—that are built together into a spiritual house that can accomplish His will on the earth in these Last Days.
- » Read I Peter 2:4-9.
- » You are welcome to be part of God's special people today. All you need to do is to confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Savior, ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and allow yourself to become a new creation in God (Galatians 6:15,16).

“HOORAY FOR TRIALS! – Part 1”

Lesson 5 ■ For week ending October 31, 2020

During testimony service have you ever heard anyone say, “Wow! I had the best trial last week. I cried and everything!” Probably not! Most of us are not happy or pleased when we experience trials and temptations; however, we need to realize that they are a part of this life. Whether we like it or not, we will experience trials and temptations. Let’s study God’s Word to see how we should respond to them.

KEY TEXT: *“Blessed is the man who endures temptation...”* (James 1:12a).

1. God’s Word makes it clear that we will experience TESTS, TRIALS, and TEMPTATIONS.

- » Most of us would associate another word with those 3 terms: **TROUBLE!**
- » According to Job 14:1, that is the fate of mankind.
- » We know that trouble for mankind started in the Garden of Eden. We need to admit up front that a lot of our tests, trials, and temptations are the result of our disobedience to the laws of God (Romans 3:23).
- » The bigger picture is this: What can we learn from these experiences?

2. A quick review of the Old Testament proves that mankind—even those following God—have been tested, tried, and tempted—since the Garden of Eden!

- » It’s unrealistic to demand a life that is free from trouble. So, what’s a Christian to do? They should have a plan to combat trouble.
- » Consider the story of Job. He was attacked because God was bragging on him (Job 1:6-12).
- » He went from being highly blessed and favored (Job 1:1-5), to sitting in a heap of ashes (Job 2:6-8).
- » Most of us know the story of how God restored everything that Job lost (Job 42:10). So, what was the purpose of this test?
- » Job discovered the awesomeness and mercy of God during his ordeal (Job 42:5,6).

3. Jesus also gave advice regarding the storms of life. It’s interesting to note that He never promised to STOP the storm—He just told us how to SURVIVE the storm.

- » Read Matthew 7:24-27.
- » Jesus tells us the secret to surviving the storms of this life: Build your house on the Solid Rock—which is Jesus!
- » He was telling His followers that it’s not just enough to listen to what Jesus says—you have to do what He says! God’s Word is our manual to survive the storms of this life and to learn a lesson while we are being tested.

4. God’s Word is adamant that we will be tested to reveal what is in our hearts.

- » Consider the account of Joseph—the son of Jacob.
- » Read Psalm 105:16-19. The last phrase of verse 19 says, *“The word of the LORD tested him.”*
- » Discuss how Joseph managed to rise to the top in every situation.
- » Consider the words of King David in Psalm 139:23,24.
- » Tests, trials, and temptations are often a result of weakness in our flesh. God allows these things to be revealed so that they are exposed and we can subsequently repent and be free of them.
- » God allows tests, trials, and temptations to reveal what is in our hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2).
- » Next week we will discuss the benefits of our trials.

“HOORAY FOR TRIALS! – Part 2”

Lesson 6 ■ For week ending November 7, 2020

Last week we discovered the fact that there is a purpose for our tests, trials, and temptations. Instead of wishing and demanding a life that is free of trouble, we should rejoice when we face adversity and seek to understand what lesson we should learn. This may seem contrary to our way of thinking, but God’s ways often are! Is it possible to be joyous about trouble?

KEY TEXT: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (James 1:2).

1. It’s safe to admit that most of us are not immediately “joyful” when trails come our way. It is often after the fact that we see the lesson we learned.

- » King David became embroiled in a web of lies, deception, and even murder during one of his trials.
- » He lusted after another man’s wife—which caused him to commit adultery which produced a child (II Samuel 11:1-5)—and subsequently orchestrated a murder to hide his actions (II Samuel 11:15-17).
- » When David’s sins were recounted to him by the prophet Nathan, what was his reaction? Read II Samuel 12:5.
- » While David was not permitted to build God’s Temple because of the innocent blood on his hands, He was restored to God and used of God after his failure (Psalm 51:1-13). Our tests, trials, and temptations do not disqualify us from being used by God.

2. It’s important to establish that Jesus does not abandon us in our tests, trials, and temptations.

- » The truth of the matter is that we often “meet Jesus” in our times of trouble.
- » Such was the account of the 3 Hebrew men and the fiery furnace. While they weren’t sure how the test would end, they did not waver in their faith towards God (Daniel 3:16-18).
- » According to Daniel 3:23-25, whom did they meet in the fiery furnace?
- » In the New Testament we have the example of Peter’s failure when He denied knowing Jesus 3 times (Matthew 26:69-75).
- » We all acknowledge that Jesus *knows* everything. What we may have missed is the fact that Jesus prayed for Peter to *remain faithful through His trial*. Read Luke 22:31-34.
- » While we cannot avoid tests, trials, and temptations—we can remain faithful through them!

3. According to James, our tests, trials, and temptations are working for our good.

- » Read James 1:2-6. Trials and testing produces patience. It is often when we are at our wits end that Jesus shows up!
- » According to James 1:4, our tests, trials, and temptations are working to make us perfect—which means mature and whole.
- » Read James 1:12-18. In this passage James describes the anatomy of temptations.
- » First, we must acknowledge that it is not God who tempts us.
- » This goes back to the lesson that our tests, trials, and temptations are exposing our areas of weakness so that they can be dealt with (Psalm 51:6).

4. What good can come from exposing our weakness?

- » Our weakness helps us understand our need for God in our lives.
- » That’s the message Paul shares in II Corinthians 12:7-10. Are you rejoicing yet?

“IMPROVING THE GOSPEL”

Lesson 7 ■ For week ending November 14, 2020

Our modern-day society claims to be the most intelligent, “woke” society ever. Suddenly, everyone is an authority on everything! Along with this new age of “enlightenment,” is a move to “improve/change” the Gospel to embrace society’s more lenient stance pertaining to living together, homosexuality, etc. For the record: “There is no way to improve/change the Gospel.” You might be surprised to learn that our generation is not the first to try and change the Gospel. Today, we will discuss Satan’s attempt to “improve” the Gospel some 2,000 years ago.

KEY TEXT: *“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (Colossians 2:18).*

1. Satan’s plan to stop mankind from serving Yahweh God has always been about deception.

- » While he may not ask you to denounce Christianity, he may try and get you to *add* something to it under the guise of making it “better”. What does God say about adding anything to His Word? Read Revelations 22:18,19.
- » In the book of Colossians, written by the Apostle Paul around 60 AD, Paul addresses the saints with a word of caution about a deception that was being taught called GNOSTICISM (pronounced NOS tuh siz um).
- » The term Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning “to know” or “knowledge.”
- » Gnosticism is the belief that you can attain higher knowledge through purging yourself of evil matter by fasting and by denying your flesh by avoiding physical pleasure.
- » Paul addresses this issue in Colossians 2:8-10.

2. Gnosticism attaches itself to a host religion—in this case Christianity—and promises to enhance it or “improve” it.

- » This new teaching proclaimed a profound knowledge apart from God (Colossians 2:8), and an emphasis on following prescribed rituals (Colossians 2:16) including the worship of angels (Colossians 2:18) and ascetic self-abasement: denying the flesh through fasting and abstention from meat (Colossians 2:18,20-23).
- » **ascetic** adjective – *characterized by or suggesting the practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons.*
- » Around the season of Passover (Easter), some priests still engage in the practice of self-flagellation (the action of flogging oneself, especially as a form of religious discipline).
- » Most of us have seen portrayals of this: a priest carrying a cross and others walking behind them flogging their backs.

3. The Early Church had disputations regarding how and when to fast (abstaining from foods).

- » Paul addressed these issues in Romans 14. He states the subject to be discussed in Romans 14:1-4. Gnosticism promoted fasting and abstention from eating meat (under the guise that it was too pleasurable for the flesh). The problem arose when some thought they were “holier” or “better” than others because of their fasting. NOTE: That’s where the tradition of Lent came from (the Roman Catholic promotion of abstaining from meat and eating fish 40 days prior to the Passover/Easter season).
- » Paul continues his discourse in Romans 14:5,6. This scripture has been erroneously used to say that we can choose any day to worship on and God doesn’t care (in promotion of the use of Sunday for worship). What Paul is really addressing is the dispute in the Early Church concerning which days to fast.
- » The Pharisees fasted 2 days a week—Mondays and Thursdays (Luke 18:11,12). The Early Church changed these dates to Wednesdays and Fridays to be different than the Jews. Paul was simply saying that they should not judge one another regarding which day they fast and *how* they fast (Romans 14:10-13).
- » Read Romans 14:14-23 to read Paul’s conclusion about the matter. He sums it up in verse 20, “*Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.*” God’s Word does not need “improved”—it is perfect as it is!

“LAUGHTER–GOD’S PRESCRIPTION FOR STRESS!”

Lesson 8 ■ For week ending November 21, 2020

Author Barbara Johnson said, “Laughter is like changing a baby’s diaper. It doesn’t permanently solve the problem, but it makes things more acceptable for a while!” There is a misconception about God and Satan that needs debunked: God is always serious, and Satan is a lot more fun. Nothing is further from the truth! The truth is that pure joy—and the laughter that follows—comes from serving God. Nothing good comes from serving Satan. **HUMOR☺**: Atheism is a non-prophet organization. Made you laugh☺!

KEY TEXT: “A joyful heart is a good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

1. The Bible says, “A cheerful disposition is good for your health.”

- » Experts confirm that laughter boosts your immune system, enhances your memory and learning abilities, relieves tension, slows your pulse rate and blood pressure, releases endorphins that reduce pain, decrease anxiety and stress, puts people at ease, and brings unity.
- » Furthermore, the effect lasts for 8 to 12 hours. It promotes emotional healing, and best of all—it’s fun! That’s why laughter is God’s prescription for stress!
- » **HUMOR☺**: My coworker, who believes Jesus Christ was the immaculately conceived son of God who rose from the dead, can’t believe it’s Monday already!
- » According to Ecclesiastes 3:4, there is a time to laugh!
- » **HUMOR☺**: Moses was leading his people through the desert for 40 years. It seems, even in Biblical times, men avoided asking for directions!
- » **HUMOR☺**: If God is watching us, the least we can do is be entertaining!

2. Reinhold Niebuhr said, “Humor is a prelude to faith and laughter is the beginning of prayer.”

- » The notion that believers should always be serious and solemn is not founded in Scripture.
- » Read Galatians 5:22,23. If we are filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, why wouldn’t we be happy?
- » **HUMOR☺**: Some people are kind, polite, and sweet-spirited until you try to sit in their pews!
- » Can we admit that we are at our happiest when we are in love, at peace, and joyful?
- » God’s people should be the happiest people on earth (Psalm 98:4). Why? Because we have God on our side—we are the champions my friend☺! Read Psalm 47:1-9.
- » **HUMOR☺**: You know those people using Bibles on their phones? They are using phony Bibles.
- » Part of God’s restoration in our lives is to restore joy, hope, and peace (Jeremiah 31:13). Consider the prayer of David in Psalm 51:23. It is Satan that robs us of our joy and peace (John 10:10).
- » **HUMOR☺**: Why are there so many old people in Church? They’re cramming for the final!

3. The Bible tells us that the joy of the Lord brings strength with it.

- » Nehemiah 8:10b says, “...Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”
- » Healthy laughter is a wonderful gift from God. He grants us the ability to laugh out loud at ourselves in the safety of family and friends.
- » The truth of the matter is that God is love. Included in that love is joy. Part of being joyful is laughter. What is LAUGHTER? Most commonly, it is considered a auditory expression of a number of positive emotional states, such as joy, mirth, happiness, relief, etc.
- » **HUMOR☺**: Give a man a fish, and you’ll feed him for a day; give him a religion, and he’ll starve to death while praying for a fish. Made you laugh☺!

“LOOKING FORWARD”

Lesson 9 ■ For week ending November 28, 2020

In this series we will study the concept of *spiritual vision*. There is an ongoing need in the life of every follower of Jesus Christ to refocus our attention on the things of God. By refocusing on Jesus, we do not lose sight of what is really important in our lives, those things that are eternal! The Scriptures reveal an amazing future for those who are faithful to the call to follow Christ. By faith and hope, we look forward to that great reward!

KEY TEXT: *“But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”* (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

1. The Bible speaks of many great things which God has prepared for those who love the Lord. These things help us stay focused in our present circumstance because we are looking forward to our future (Romans 8:24,25). Let’s take a few moments to discuss some of the things which God has prepared.

- » Eternal Life (John 3:16).
 - » A Crown of Life (James 1:12).
 - » A Crown of Righteousness (II Timothy 4:7-8).
 - » A New Body (Romans 8:23, II Corinthians 5:1).
 - » A New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelations 21:1-5).
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2. It is important to have something to look forward to.

- » Proverbs 29:18 states, *“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”*
 - » Strong’s defines the word *vision* in this passage as *a dream, a revelation, or oracle*.
 - » It is by the Word, or oracles of God (Romans 3:2), that we know God’s plan for the future.
 - » Consider the strength we receive from knowing God holds our future (Jeremiah 29:11).
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3. Having a proper vision of God’s plan for your future will help you to be clear about how you should live your life today.

- » The Apostle Paul declared in his writings, *“The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:17).
 - » What is the definition of faith according to Hebrews 11:1,2?
 - **HEBREWS 11:1,2**, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.”*
 - » Discuss the profound impact faith had on the way Moses chose to live his life as you read Hebrews 11:24-27.
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4. Our greatest example and encouragement to keep looking forward is the life of Jesus.

- » Study Hebrews 12:1,2, *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*
- » What do you think was *the joy that was set before Him*?

“LOOKING BACKWARD”

Lesson 10 ■ For week ending December 5, 2020

One of the best ways to know God’s will and gain a comprehensive vision of His plan for your life—both now and in the future—is to look at how God has done things in the past. While we certainly do not want to live in the past, we can learn from history, or “His Story,” as some have put it. By looking into the past, we have the advantage of learning from the mistakes and victories of others. Hindsight is 20/20 vision. In other words, it is when we *look back* at a circumstance or an event that we have a clearer vision of it and of how we could have done it better.

KEY TEXT: “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee” (Deuteronomy 32:7).

1. One of the great advantages that we as believers have today is the written Word of God.

- » The Bible is a record of God’s dealings with His people spanning from Creation all the way into eternity.
- » Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*
- » The Scriptures were written down so that we could look into the past and learn.
- » An example of this is found in I Corinthians 10:6-11.
- » What are some things we can learn from the time of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness?

2. Another reason looking back to the past is important is because God does not change.

- » The single most important tool for understanding the will of God for any dispensation is the divine Law of Immutability.
 - **immutable** adjective – *unchanging over time or unable to be changed.*
- » Divine Law is the one law which Yahweh, the Eternal God, established to govern His own actions. It is the nucleus and governing factor for any action of God.
 - The term Divine Law means *the governing element of that which pertains to or proceeds from the nature of God.*
- » Simply stated, *“God does not change”*(Malachi 3:6).
 - Divine Law is that principle of God which is perpetual and immutable (unchangeable) regardless of time, people, or circumstance.
- » Examine Ecclesiastes 3:14,15.

3. Looking backward does not mean we should dwell in the past.

- » Dwelling in the past can cause you great trouble and hinder you from moving forward.
- » Remember the story of Lot’s wife (Genesis 19:17,26).
- » We must not allow the past to keep us from moving into our future.
- » The children of Israel kept looking back to Egypt when God wanted to bring them into the Promised Land. Discuss Exodus 14:12-16.

4. The purpose of considering the past is so that we know how to go forward.

- » The Apostle Paul put it like this, *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

“LOOKING UPWARD”

Lesson 11 ■ For week ending December 12, 2020

We as Christians live in this world—but we are not of it! There is a lot in this world to keep us distracted from the reality of Jesus Christ and His coming kingdom. The truth is that Jesus is coming again and we need to keep our eyes focused on Him. The old songs says, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace!”

KEY TEXT: *“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1,2).*

1. When Jesus had completed His time here on earth, He ascended in the clouds back into heaven.

- » Read the account of this event found in Acts 1:6-11.
- » Jesus has taken His place at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 8:1).
- » He will remain there until the time appointed of the Father (Hebrews 1:13; Mark 13:32).

2. After His ascension, Jesus assumed the position in heaven as our Forever High Priest.

- » He has become the mediator between God and Man (I Timothy 2:5).
- » He has given us access to the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 10:19-22).
- » He gives gifts unto men (Ephesians 4:7,8).
- » It is essential that we keep looking up to Jesus as our source for everything that we have need of (Hebrews 4:14-16).
- » Jesus hears and answers of prayers!

3. Our focus must remain on Jesus and His coming kingdom rather than the things of this world.

- » We are exhorted in our key text to *“set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth.”*
- » What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:19-21,33)?
- » There will be a people who have their hearts fixed on Jesus and will be watching and waiting for His return (Luke 12:35-38).

4. We know according to prophecy that in the Last Days, the world will become increasingly wicked. The earth is in for a shaking as God begins to pour out His judgment in preparation of the return of His Son.

- » Study Luke 21:25-28.
 - 25 *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;*
 - 26 *Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.*
 - 27 *And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*
 - 28 *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”*
- » What does Jesus admonish those who are living during this time to do?

“LOOKING INWARD”

Lesson 12 ■ For week ending December 19, 2020

Our vision is something of great value. For most of us, as we grow older, our eyes begin to weaken and it is necessary for us to get an eye exam and wear glasses so that we can see clearly. In much the same way, we must also keep a check up on our spiritual vision. We must take a good hard look at ourselves to be sure that we have nothing in our heart that would obscure our vision of God or others.

KEY TEXT: “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

1. Jesus taught about the importance of checking our spiritual vision.

- » In Matthew 6:22,23, Jesus describes the difference between a good eye and a bad eye.
- » Notice the context of this passage. Jesus is talking about how money or possessions can rule a person’s heart and become a god.
- » Compare this with I John 2:15,16 and Proverbs 27:30.

2. When a person’s heart (inner man) is not right, their eyes can get them into a lot of trouble.

- » Sin begins with lust in the heart (James 1:14,15).
 - **JAMES 1:14,15**, *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*
- » Examine Jesus’ teaching on how to deal with an adulterous heart and a lustful eye (Matthew 5:27-29).
- » King David’s prayer of repentance after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba gives us insight into what needs to happen in the heart of man (Psalms 51:10-12).
- » What happens to our spiritual vision when our heart is pure (Titus 1:15)?

3. We must allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and be cleansed from any unrighteousness.

- » The Psalmist wrote, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23,24).
- » Discuss Jesus’ message to the Pharisees that they clean the inside (Matthew 23:24-28). Notice that Jesus told them that they were blind.
- » We must be willing to allow the light of God’s Word to reveal our inward sins so that we can repent and be forgiven (John 3:20,21).
 - **JOHN 3:20,21**, *“For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”*

4. Before we can effectively minister to others, we must be willing to take a good hard look at ourselves. Only when we truly see our own faults and understand the grace and mercy that God has shown to us can we see clearly to help someone else.

- » Read and discuss Matthew 7:3-5, *“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”*

“LOOKING OUTWARD”

Lesson 13 ■ For week ending December 26, 2020

The vision Jesus gives for His Church is one of outreach. He has called us and empowered us to look beyond ourselves to see that there is a whole world that is in great need of a Savior. It is very easy to lose sight of the harvest that is before us as we endeavor to keep up the status quo of our local church family. We must continually endeavor to look beyond our four walls to see WHERE the Lord wants us to go and WHO He wants us to minister to.

KEY TEXT: *“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).*

1. Jesus gave the Great Commission to instill vision in His Church. It is a vision to always look beyond where we are in search of someone who is lost.

- » This was the message He gave the Church as He prepared them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).
- » We are to start where we are and not stop till we reach the ends of the earth.
- » The Apostle Paul strived to go into areas where the Gospel had never been preached.
- » This is the reason He had a hard time getting back around to some of the churches he had already established (Romans 15:20-22).

2. Sadly, sometimes we miss opportunities to lead people to Christ because we are not paying attention to what God is doing right in front of us.

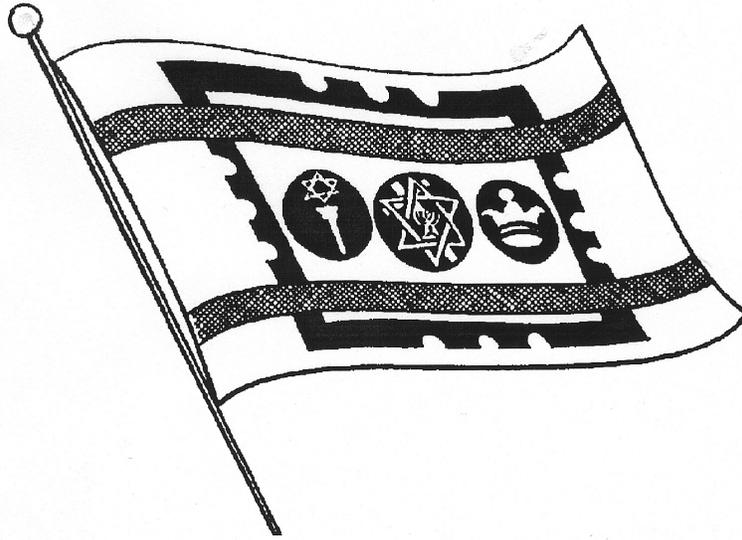
- » After Jesus had minister to the Samaritan woman at the well, He wanted His disciples to feel the same urgency that He was experiencing.
- » This is where Jesus told them, *“Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35).*
- » Please take a moment to make this a personal matter as you pray this prayer: *“Lord, give us such a sense of urgency about winning souls into your Kingdom that we will continually look with expectancy for the souls You have prepared for us to reach. In Jesus name, Amen!”*

3. The idea of “Looking Outward” also means that we are not only focused on ourselves and what we are doing, but we are willing to partner with other ministries in the Body of Christ in order to further the cause of Jesus Christ.

- » Discuss this important concept in light of Philippians 2:3-6.
- » Praise God! When we work together, God gives the increase!
- » Read I Corinthians 3:5-9.

4. When we see a need and we take action to meet the need, we demonstrate the great love that God has shown us.

- » Read and discuss I John 3:16-18.
- » The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all saw the condition of the man who had fallen among thieves.
- » It was the Samaritan that looked beyond himself and had compassion on his neighbor (Luke 10:30-37).



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