

TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART

Planting the seeds of God & the Gospel



VERSION 4.0
YMAM BELT

"The one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Matthew 13:23

THE TRANSFORMATION SERIES

Transformation of the Heart TS Level 1 v4.0

LIST OF TOPICS

1. Pursuing the Truth
2. The Greatness of God
3. The Goodness of God
4. Growing in Friendship with God
5. The Value and Design of People
6. God's Laws of Love
7. The Root of Sin
8. The Destructiveness of Sin
9. The Kindness of God in Salvation
10. Salvation from Sin
11. The Command of Missions (optional)

NEW IN THE TS1 DISCOVERY VERSION 4.0

In this latest revision, outlines incorporate the participatory learning approach that is already encouraged in BELT's methodology and values. This method allows participants to discover answers in God's Word through collaborative and active learning. TS Discovery v4.0 has retained the Bible storying format from TS Storying v3.0.

New in this version are:

- *Regional Poster Sets* - customized to Latin America, Asia and Africa/Pacific. To further accommodate rural and urban settings, some lessons are illustrated by a toilet pit or a garbage heap (new). Team leaders can select which is most suitable for their audience.
- *Outreach Story Set* – the story(s) from each lesson most suitable for Bible Storytelling in seminars and on outreach are indicated by a double asterisk (**).
- *Simple and Extended Outlines* - for participants, simple outlines are shorter and include core content and poster only. Extended outlines, for instructors and participants if desired, contain extra content as described below.
- *Reflection Questions* - designed for personal evaluation, these may be used in group discussions where appropriate.
- *Application Activity* - provides optional creative ideas for response times, one of the most important elements of any teaching. Please feel free to use, adjust or generate your own responsive, creative activities.
- *Further Study* - includes material for additional study, but may also be discussed in class if appropriate and time allows.
- *Poster Description* - explains the images and symbols used in the new posters.
- *Additional References* - many verses are listed in parenthesis which are included as a reference for participants for later study. Choose what is most fitting for your teaching, and of course add those the Spirit leads you to.

For information on the overview of the TS series, University of the Nations credit and BELT Instructor Training, please see BELT's Guiding Document found at: ywambelt.org/core-values-beliefs. For other seminar details, including goals and schedule, go to BELT's Information Packet: ywambelt.org/about-our-seminars.

PERSONALIZING THE OUTLINES

The TS outline is a guide for the BELT instructor, rather than a rigid script to be followed. The outlines provide key ideas and Scriptures on each topic. However each instructor shapes the lesson according to the leading of the Spirit and the audience (see below) so each teaching should look uniquely different each time. The outline order can be adjusted to make things flow, but direct the participants if they are following their own outlines.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE CONTENT

Please adapt the TS curriculum to your teaching situation. Keep in mind:

- **Felt needs.** The Lord wants to speak into the needs of your audience. Be asking Him and the organizing committee how to make your teaching relevant.
- **Learning styles.** Vary teaching methods to accommodate different educational levels and learning styles (including auditory, visual and kinesthetic).
- **Oral learners.** In oral settings, people process information and remember differently from others. Focus on using stories, drama, personal testimonies, discussions, objects and visuals. It is difficult for oral learners to understand and remember lists, abstract concepts, etc.
- **Cultural context.** Images and colors on the posters, along with examples and illustrations and stories, should be adapted to fit each unique situation with advice from local leaders.
- **Language.** Translate and teach the outlines in the language the participants understand best. In mixed-language situations, lessons are usually taught in the regional language with small group activities and discussions conducted in local languages.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BELT curriculum has been significantly influenced by YWAM's foundational teaching, but specifically by teaching from the BSN (Bible School for the Nations), SOTB (School of the Bible), and TFN (Teachers for the Nations). We are grateful for the many talented people who have contributed to the development of the TS curriculum through the years. Thanks to the many voices who gave input on the development of v4.0 posters and curriculum. A special thanks to Evynn Schlender who patiently endured numerous revisions while illustrating the posters so beautifully.

We pray that this TS curriculum will be used to make an impact in lives, families and communities across the globe. Please send any testimonies, comments or suggestions to info@ywambelt.org.

Mark & Heidi Evans
www.ywambelt.org

Pursuing the Truth

Summary. God wants us to know Him and to make Him known on the earth. So He sent us the Bible and Jesus, both of which are called the Word of God. The more we understand and apply the truths of the Word of God in our own lives, the more our lives and ministry will be transformed.

A. THE VEILING OF TRUTH

The Story of the Four Soils. Mark 4:1-10, 13-20 **

1. What does the seed represent?
2. Who do the birds represent? Why does Satan want to steal the seed?
3. What do the rocky soil and the thorny soil represent? How do these things stop believers from being fruitful in their lives?



The strategy of Satan. Satan (the birds) wants to steal the Word of God (the seed) from people so they won't know the truth (hard soil). His main strategy is deception (lies) and blindness (ignorance) to the truth. Then people will live in darkness and eventually be destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; John 8:44; John 10:10.

Receiving the Word. Some people hear the Word of God and initially receive it, but the difficulties and persecution they experience (rocky soil), or the temptations of the world around them (thorny soil), stop them from being fruitful. The Word planted in the good soil will grow, reproduce and influence those around for good.

Blind Guides Leading the Blind. Matthew 15:12-14

1. Jesus calls the Pharisees blind guides. What is the purpose of a guide? What is Jesus trying to reveal about the Pharisees?
2. Read John 4:23-24 and Hosea 4:6 and discuss what these verses say about the need for truth in God's people.

The need for truth. The Jewish religious leaders during the time of Jesus were not only blind themselves, but were leading their followers in a wrong and dangerous direction. If the church is to know God and be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16), we must have a correct understanding of truth.

B. GOD IS ACTIVELY REVEALING TRUTH

God Wants Us to Know Truth.

1. In what ways is God revealing truth to people?
Romans 1:20; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16; John 16:13
2. Why is Jesus called the Word? Why does Jesus call Himself the Truth?
John 1:1-5, 14, 18; John 14:6-7

Creation. God has worked throughout history to reveal the truth of Himself to us. The vastness of the universe reveals the unlimited power and intelligence of God. The abundant varieties and colors in creation reveal God's amazing creativeness and attention to details.

The prophets and written Word. God made Himself known throughout Old Testament times through His prophets. These messengers were inspired by God to write down the words spoken to them. As a result, we have an accurate, unchanged record of historical events and God's will for us. God's Word is the standard for our beliefs, our lives and our ministry. (Psalm 119:105)

The Spirit of Truth. Knowing the truth is not just about having an accurate understanding of the way things really are (the right ideas). More importantly, it is knowing the One who is the Truth (a person). The Holy Spirit, as well as Jesus, are both called the Truth. The Spirit is given to guide us to the truth and helps us to live it out. (Galatians 5:16, 22-23)

*"The reason I (Jesus) came into the world is to tell people about the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."
John 18:37*

Jesus, the living Word. The perfect revelation of truth came through Jesus. He is called the Word, the living testimony of what God is like and how we are to live. He came to bring truth (light) to people living in ignorance and sin (darkness). (See also Luke 1:78-79; John 8:12)

C. LIVING BY TRUTH RESULTS IN FREEDOM AND FRUITFULNESS



*The Story of the Two Builders. Matthew 7:24-27 ***

1. What is the immediate context prior to this story?
2. What is the main point of the story of the two builders?

A strong foundation. At the conclusion of His longest message, Jesus reminds His listeners that simply hearing His message (truth) is not enough (see also James 1:22-25). Application of truth is essential for us to have a strong foundation to stand securely through the challenges of life.

The Importance of Knowing the Bible.

1. From the following passages, what do we discover about the benefits of knowing and living by truth? 2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 8:31-32; Romans 12:2
2. How can Joshua have success as Israel's new leader? Joshua 1:7-8

Bearing much fruit. The Bible gives instructions for right living and corrects us when we are wrong. As we understand and apply truth, the more fruitful we (and our ministries) will become and the freer (from sin and ignorance) we and our communities will become.

Success in leadership. God promises success to Joshua if he daily reflects on God's Word and puts it into practice.

Attitudes When Studying the Bible.

1. What attitudes should we have when studying the Word of God? Acts 17:10-12; Proverbs 2:1-6

Searching for truth. Discovering and applying truth takes diligence and a teachable heart.



Reflection Questions

1. Are you pursuing the truth? Is it a priority to understand and apply God's truth – both personally, in your family and in your community?
2. Are there areas in your life you recognize that do not align with the truth revealed in God's Word? What can you do about those?
3. Are you experiencing freedom and fruitfulness in your life? What about in your community? If not, check the soil of the ideas believed and practiced.



Application Activity

Plant a seed. A seed contains the potential for new life. God's Word is like that seed. As we allow the Bible to take root in our hearts, it can bring about new life and healthy growth in us. Give out seeds to the participants to plant in a cup or in the ground outside. The act of planting a seed represents the desire to grow in God's ways and a commitment to immediately apply the truth that God reveals to us.



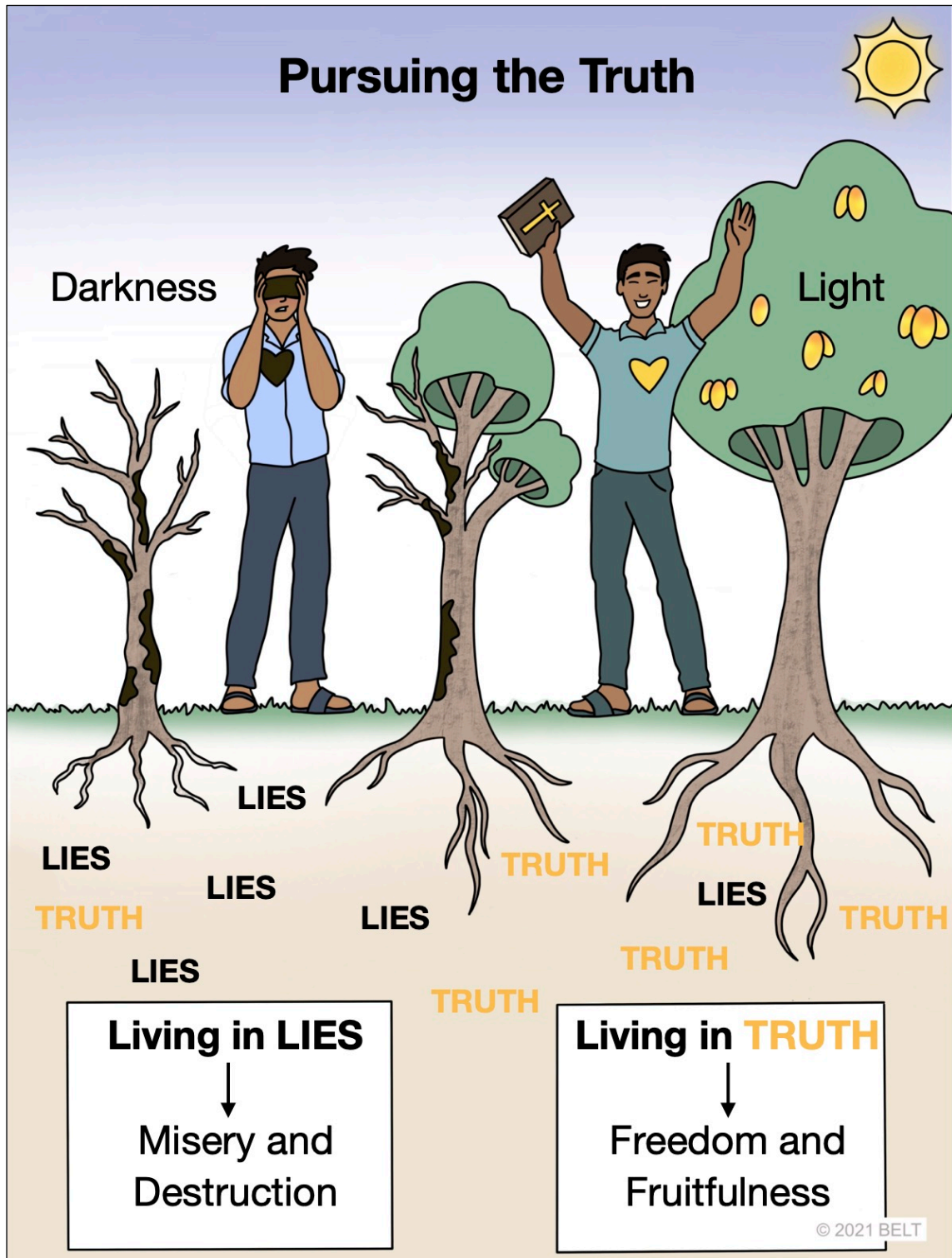
Further Study (Optional)

1. **The downward slope of sin.** Romans 1:18-32; Isaiah 44:6-8, 13-20
Some people deliberately ignore and hide the truth of God so that they can live immoral lives. Although they think they are wise, they become foolish in their thinking and hardened (darkened) in their hearts. They exchange truth for a lie, and foolishly worship creation and man-made idols rather than the true and living Creator. They increasingly live in selfish and wicked ways, encouraging others to do the same. God holds those responsible who deliberately ignore the truth about Himself which is obvious in creation.
2. **The law within us.** Romans 2:14-16 God made all people with a "law" written on their hearts. God provides everyone with a conscience (an internal testimony of truth or moral compass) so all people have a basic knowledge of right and wrong. Continuing to act against our conscience results in decreasing feelings of guilt and shame. This results in a hardened conscience (heart), making it easier to sin.



Poster Description

The roots of the trees get their nourishment from the soil. If the soil is good (full of truth), the tree will be healthy (large tree with fruit). If the soil is bad (many lies), the tree will suffer and eventually die. The more truth that is understood and lived out (man holding the Bible and loving God), the more free and fruitful our lives, relationships and communities will become. But refusing to live by known truth (man living for himself with darkened heart) or being unaware of truth (blindfold) leads to misery and eventual destruction. Pursuing truth is a life-long journey (uprooting lies from the good soil).



The Greatness of God

Summary: As the Author of life and Creator of everything, God is unlimited in His power, knowledge and presence. Yet He is very personal and loves to bless us. The friendship within the Trinity models for us how to be unified, though we are wonderfully diverse. This is the first lesson (of two) describing our great and good God.

A. GOD IS THE CREATOR

The Greatness of God in Creation.

1. What do we learn about God from His creation? Psalms 19:1-2; Genesis 1:1, 31 (for the full creation story see Genesis 1:1-31)
2. Discuss how great and incomparable God is. Isaiah 40:12-28 (Psalm 33:6-9)

God creates a beautiful world. God is far greater than any other person, ruler, spirit or idol. He simply spoke and the heavens and the earth came into being. As a loving Provider, God prepared an extraordinary world for us to live in and enjoy. He made a beautiful and fascinating planet full of living creatures, variety and color. The complex and vast universe contains an uncountable number of stars. God's amazing creation displays His unlimited power, intelligence, creativity and care for details, order and beauty.

*"The heavens are telling of the glory of God, and the skies are announcing the work of His hands."
Psalm 19:1*

God is everlasting (uncreated). God, as the Creator of all things, is uncreated and exists apart from His creation. He is everlasting (eternal), having no beginning and no end. Revelation 4:8; 22:13; Psalms 90:2, 4

Jesus Calms the Storm. Mark 4:36-41 **

1. What do the disciples' reactions during the storm reveal?
2. What does this story reveal about Jesus?

Jesus has power over creation. The disciples are terrified by the storm. They do not understand that the Maker and Ruler of those very seas is with them. As the Son of God and part of the creation team (John 1:1-3), Jesus still has authority over all His creation.

B. GOD IS ALL POWERFUL

Jesus Sets a Demon-Possessed Man Free. Mark 5:1-20 **

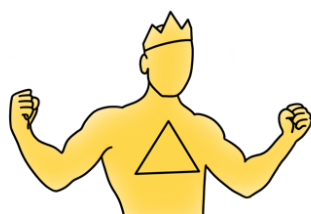
1. Describe the ways the possessed man is being controlled by the evil spirits.
2. How does the story demonstrate that Jesus has authority over demons?

Jesus and evil spirits. The man is controlled by a legion of evil spirits (a Roman legion is about 5000 soldiers) who give him supernatural strength, speak through him and torment him. The demon-possessed man bows down before Jesus, recognizing Jesus' power and highest authority.

The demons flee at Jesus' command, leaving the man at peace and a testimony to Jesus' authority over evil spirits.

Jesus Raises Jairus' Daughter. Mark 5:21-43

1. What similarities do you see in each of these people who desire a miracle?
2. What do these stories reveal about Jesus?



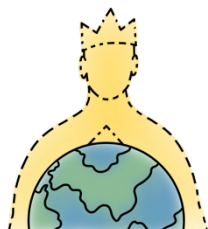
Jesus and sickness. Both Jairus and the woman with the sickness understand Jesus' authority. These miracles reveal Jesus's power over sickness and death.

God the Almighty. God's unlimited power is a central attribute of His greatness. God is called the Almighty throughout the Bible. (Genesis 17:1; Revelation 11:17)

C. GOD KNOWS ALL THINGS AND IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE

Jonah Tries to Flee from God. Jonah 1:1-17; 2:1-10

1. Why does Jonah try to flee to Tarshish?
2. What does Jonah learn about the greatness of God from his experience?



Jonah prays to God from the belly of a fish. The Assyrians (whose capital was Nineveh) are enemies of Israel. They are very cruel and wicked, deserving of God's judgment. Jonah refuses to preach to his enemies and instead tries to flee from God and sail far away. God knows what Jonah is doing. He sends a storm and a big fish to swallow Jonah when he is thrown overboard (God has power over His creation). God hears and answers Jonah's repentant cry from the belly of the fish deep in the ocean (God has access to us everywhere).

God Knows All Our Ways. Psalm 139:1-12, 17-18

1. Discuss what it means for us that God is unlimited in his knowledge and presence.



God is unlimited in His knowledge – He knows all there is to know (Psalm 147:4-5). He is aware of our thoughts and the secrets of our hearts, both good and bad. Nothing escapes His notice. (1 Chronicles 28:9; Hebrews, 4:13; Psalm 44:20-21). He always uses His immeasurable intelligence for the benefit of others (wisdom).

God has access to everyone at the same time. There is nowhere we can hide from God. He can hear and respond to millions of prayers in an instant. We can experience the presence of God even in the darkest of places.

God is spirit. Although God is always with us, He is "invisible" or spirit. He has no physical form or a body like us. In the Bible, God is said to have human body parts like hands, eyes or ears. These are word pictures (metaphors) used mostly in poetic writing that give human characteristics to God

to make Him more relatable to us. Because God is spirit, He does not have the physical limitations we do. 1 Timothy 1:17; John 4:24; Isaiah 40:28

D. GOD IS RELATIONAL

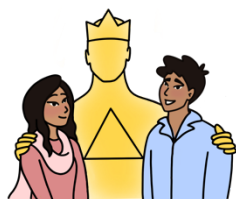
The Perfect Unity of the Trinity

1. How do we see the relationship of the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) at creation and at Jesus baptism? Genesis 1:1, 26; 3:22; John 1:1-3; Luke 3:21-22
2. How does Jesus describe the closeness of His relationship with God? John 14:7-10; 15:9-10; 17:1; 17:20-23



The Trinity team. The Bible reveals that at the creation of the world and the baptism of Jesus, all three persons of the Trinity are present and working together as a united team. They are equal in their abilities (power, knowledge and presence). They share a common purpose and love for each other (perfect unity). Yet they are distinct from each other, having different roles (diversity).

The friendship within the Trinity. At Jesus' baptism, the Father calls Jesus His beloved Son. The name most used by Jesus for God is Father, revealing the closeness that exists between them. Jesus prays that all believers, even of diverse backgrounds, would be one in the same way He and the Father are one. When the church is unified in this way (sharing a common purpose and love for each other), it displays the beauty of the Trinity, and unbelievers are drawn to Jesus.



God is personal. God made us in His likeness with relational abilities (thinking, speaking, feeling, choosing) so we can know Him as a friend. God is interested in our lives and responsive to our needs. He is not a distant or an impersonal power like the gods of some religions.
1 Kings 19:9-13; Acts 17:28-29; Isaiah 43:1-2; Isaiah 49:14-16



Reflection Questions

1. Which quality of God's greatness stands out to you the most? Why?
2. Identify any of your ideas about God that have been challenged or deepened by this lesson.



Application Activity

Demonstration of God's power. God is exceedingly great and He is also exceedingly kind. He is interested in everything about us. Is anyone needing a demonstration of the power of God in their life today – for healing or difficult situations? Let's together invite the Lord to do a miracle as we focus on His greatness in worship. (James 5:14-15)



Further Study (Optional)

1. **The unity and diversity in creation.** Just like its Creator, every part of God's amazing creation (stars, animals, people, etc.) displays unity and diversity. For example, all leaves on a tree look similar (unity) but each is unique or slightly different from the others (diversity).
2. **Models of the Trinity.** The church and marriage are two biblical examples that help describe how the Trinity relate to one another. **The church.** See comments above (John

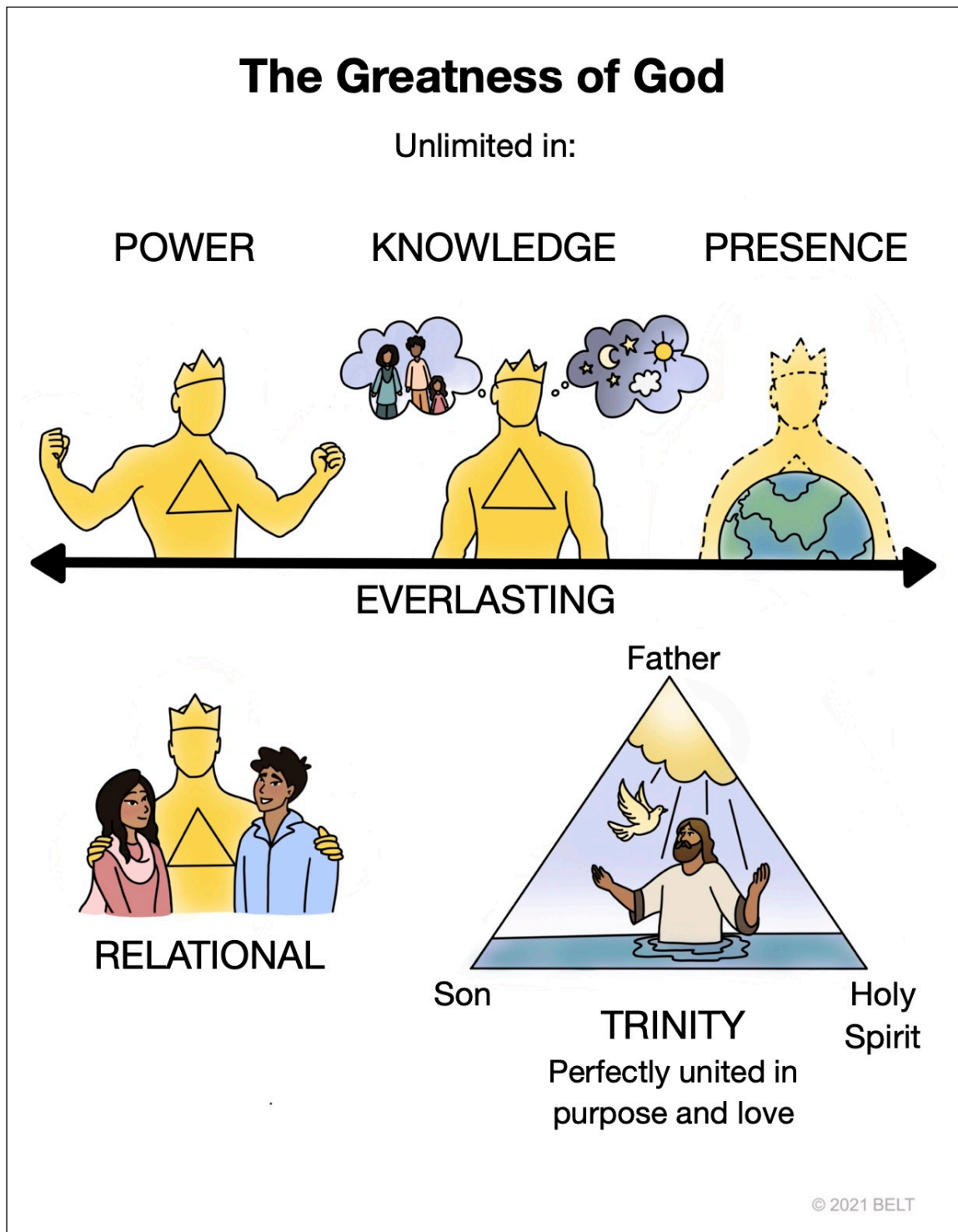
17:20-23). The church is one body (of Christ), but with many diverse members and gifts (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27). **Marriage.** A man and a woman (diversity) are joined together in marriage as “one flesh” – unified in purpose and love (Genesis 2:24-25). The Hebrew word (*echad*) used to describe the oneness in marriage is the same word used for “the Lord...is one God” (Deuteronomy 6:4). This Hebrew word for one is only used when there is a unity of parts and never for a single object. For example, many individual grapes make up one cluster of grapes. (Other verses using *echad*: Numbers 13:23; 1 Chronicles 12:38).

3. **Comparing religions.** Only Christianity has a God that is both all-powerful and personal, demonstrating unity and diversity. In Islam, Allah is all-powerful but not personal. He exists alone as one god (unity without diversity). Hinduism has many gods but they fight each other (diversity without unity). With Animism and Hinduism, the spirits are powerful and unpredictable. They are not to be befriended, only appeased with offerings.



Poster Description

God's power, knowledge and presence have no limits (three main attributes on top). God is invisible or spirit (dotted line) and has no beginning or end (timeline). He interacts in a relational and personal way (we are made in God's likeness). The Trinity all have equal divine abilities (all part of the same God triangle) and model perfect unity in their diversity (3 points on triangle / baptism of Jesus). There is nothing or no one that compares to God's greatness who is King over all (crown).



The Goodness of God

Summary: We become like the god(s) we worship. So an accurate Biblical understanding of God's good and loving character is essential for our character growth, a fulfilling life with God, and to represent Him well. The way we view God will also affect the way we interpret events and personal experiences. As a loving Father, He always chooses to use His abilities for our highest good so He cannot be blamed for the troubles in the world and our lives. Our great and perfectly good God deserves our loyalty and worship.

A. GOD IS ALWAYS GOOD AND LOVING

God Reveals His Goodness to Moses. Exodus 33:13, 17-19; 34:6-8

1. When Moses asks God to reveal His glory (all that God is), what does God reveal?
2. Why is this important?

God's goodness. Moses desires to know God and asks God to reveal His glory. But God does not reveal His power and greatness. Instead He reveals all His goodness. Moses has already seen the power of God when He delivered the Israelites from Egypt. Moses also needs to see the character of God to really know Him and be close to Him. As a result, Moses falls on his face in worship. God is not only immeasurably powerful, but He is also immeasurably good.

The Story of the Loving Father. Luke 15:1-2, 11-32 **

1. Why does Jesus tell this story?
2. In what ways has the younger son brought shame to his family? How do we see his change of heart?
3. Contrast the older brother and father's response to the prodigal when he returns.

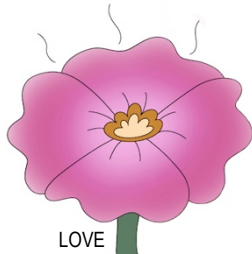
God's compassion on sinners. Jesus is revealing to the Pharisees the great mercy and love of God towards sinners. The younger brother knows he brought great shame to his family by demanding his inheritance (wishing his father was dead) and shamefully wasting the family's wealth. In desperation and in humility, he returns home.

The older brother is angry to see his brother return after ruining the family's reputation. The lost son is hoping for mercy and a job as a servant, but he instead discovers his father eagerly waiting for his return. Running to the prodigal, the father embraces him, restores him as a son, and even throws a big party in celebration of his return. Instead of disgrace and rejection, the selfish son receives forgiveness and restoration. Jesus wants us to know He is likewise filled with grace, compassion and love towards the worst of sinners.

*"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."
Luke 15:20*

God is Love.

1. From the previous story and the following Scriptures, how would you describe the love of God? 1 John 4:7-10; Psalm 145:8-9; Matthew 5:43-45
2. Share a personal story where you have experienced God's love and kindness towards you.



Love defined. Love is sacrificial and unselfish. It initiates good towards others. Love chooses to do the highest good for others. (It is a choice, not a feeling.) It is the primary attribute of God's character.

Our heavenly Father's love for His children. God is a father to the fatherless and a protector of the vulnerable (Psalm 68:5-6). He will never abandon us. He is interested in even the smallest details of our lives. He always seeks our highest good. He disciplines us in patience and love. We may have brought grief to God by our sinful actions, but God forgives us when we repent and welcomes us into His family, as His sons and daughters.

The difference between God's goodness and greatness. God's greatness (nature) refers to His great abilities and power. God's goodness (character) is what He chooses to do with His greatness. God is love because He always chooses to use His great abilities in ways that bring benefit and blessing.

B. GOD'S CHARACTER QUALITIES ARE EXPRESSIONS OF HIS LOVE

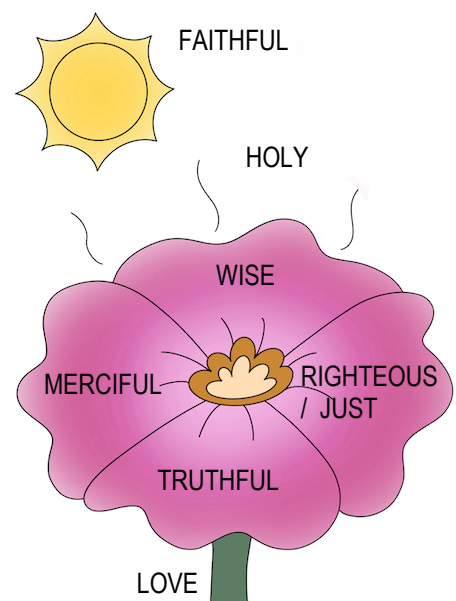
We Can Trust God's Love.

1. In what ways do you see God expressing His character of love?
2. In groups, discuss one of the character qualities of God. Read to the class a verse that best describes this quality. Illustrate it with a song, a drama or picture.

Truthful: God accurately describes things the way they really are for our benefit. He never lies or hides what is best for us so that we can live in freedom. Jesus' life beautifully reveals God's grace and truth (John 1:14, 18). John 18:33-38; John 16:13.

Wise: God uses His unlimited knowledge in practical and loving ways for the good of others. By wisdom and power, God designed a wonderfully complex world for our benefit and enjoyment (Jeremiah 51:15). God used His great wisdom to bring about His surprising plan of redemption at just the right time in history (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). He freely offers wisdom to all who seek to live by it. James 1:5; Romans 11:33-34

Merciful: God is kind and forgiving to those who don't deserve it. He is always patient in bringing judgment (slow to anger), hoping that sinners will change their ways. Like the story of the loving father, God extends mercy to the humble and restores them to Himself. Ephesians 2:4-5; Psalm 86:5; 2 Peter 3:9



Righteous and Just: God always does what is right and fair (Psalm 89:14). He hates evil and injustice, especially against the poor and helpless (Jeremiah 7:5-7). He shows no favoritism and cannot be bribed. As the righteous Judge of the earth (Genesis 18:25), God will punish evil. Yet he is always looking for opportunities to extend mercy if people are willing to change (Jonah 3:10 – Jonah and Nineveh). Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 45:6-7

Faithful: God is unchanging and consistent in His commitment to live by love. He is completely dependable even when we are unfaithful (2 Timothy 2:13). He will never forsake us and He will always fulfil His promises. Hebrews 13:8; Deuteronomy 7:9; James 1:17

Holy: God always does what is most loving – choosing to do what He knows to be right and good in every situation. Holiness is a summary of the way God lives. He deserves our worship. Psalm 18:30; 1 John 1:5; Ephesians 5:8-9

God cannot be blamed for evil. God lives out love perfectly (Matthew 5:48), therefore He cannot be blamed for any wrongs or wickedness in this world. God is deeply grieved over all sin and evil in the world (Genesis 6:5-6, Psalm 78:40). He is actively working to bring change, often through transformed individuals who know and express His love and ways.

C. GOD IS THE RULER



Around God's throne. The living creatures before God's throne in heaven continually declare who God is and how He reigns. They proclaim the greatness (Almighty) of the Trinity as well as their everlasting perfection and goodness (holy, holy, holy). Just as Moses worshipped when God's goodness was proclaimed, the 24 elders around the throne fall down on their faces in worship. Revelation 4:8-11.

God Most High. God is the highest authority and most qualified to rule the universe and our lives because of His greatness and goodness. Psalm 47:2; 1 Timothy 6:15-16; (Revelation 15:3-4; Daniel 4:28-37)



Reflection Questions

1. Consider your ideas about God that have been challenged or deepened by this lesson. Which quality of God's goodness stands out to you the most? Why?
2. Are there things that have happened where you find yourself blaming God? Are you feeling like He doesn't care? Consider the truth of who God really is.



Application Activity (2 options)

Scripture Reflection. As Revelation 4:1-11 is read aloud, close your eyes and imagine yourself as one of the 24 elders before the throne of God. Recreate the scene in your mind. Engage your senses: see, listen, smell, feel. What is God saying to you in this scene? Respond.

Remembering the goodness of God. When you don't know what to do, recall God's goodness. Think about a situation that is difficult for you or where you are in need of help. Speak out God's goodness as a reminder that He is for you and is working all things together for good for those who love Him (Romans 8:28). Examples:

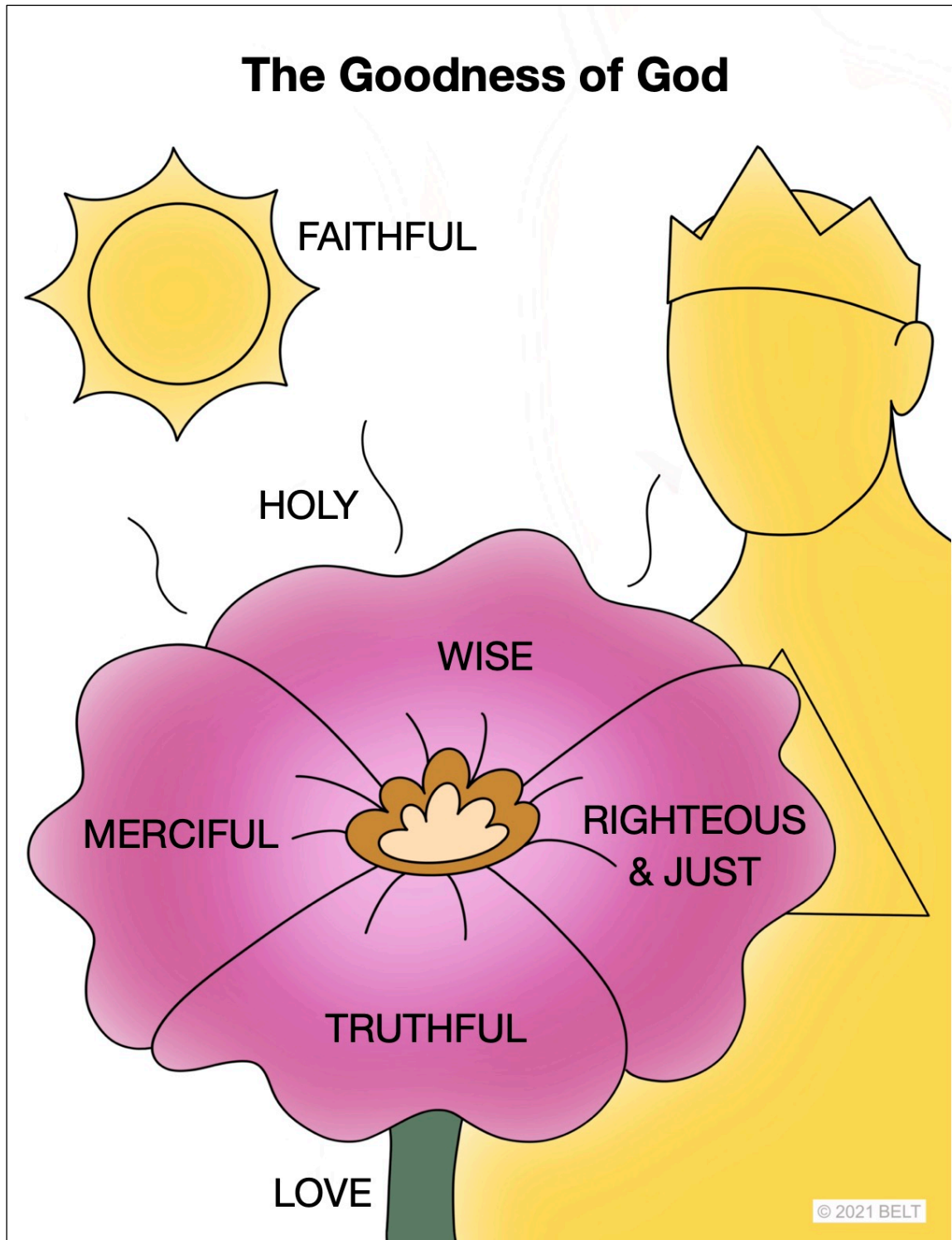
- *God, you are good.* (You are for me. Your thoughts toward me are of love and good will. I trust your plans for me which are to prosper me and not to harm me....)
- *God, you are truthful.* (You will never mislead me. You are revealing your ways to me through your Word so I can live in freedom....)

- *God, you are wise.* (I can trust your guidance and instruction. You lead me in good paths....)
- *God, you are just.* (You are always right and fair in your discipline and correction...)
- *God, you are faithful.* (I can count on you in this situation to bring about your promises in my life....)



Poster Description

All that God is and does comes from His unchanging choice to love. God's love directs His truthfulness, wisdom, mercy and justice / righteousness (like flower petals receiving nutrients through the stem). We can rely on God's faithful commitment to love in every situation (the sun rises every day). Because God lives out love perfectly, He is holy (the beauty and aroma of a flawless flower) and the most worthy of our worship and devotion.



Growing in Friendship with God

Summary: The great and personal Creator of the universe wants to be known. He invites us to be close friends with Him. We are offered the privilege to spend time talking to Him (prayer), sharing our appreciation (worship), as well as listening to Him (through the Bible and His internal whispers).

A. WE WERE CREATED FOR CLOSE FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

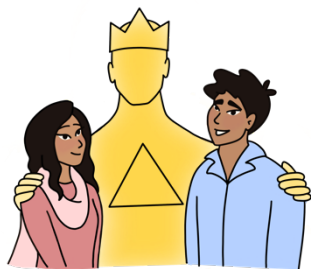
Mary and Martha. Luke 10:38-42 **

1. Why is Martha so upset at Mary? Is Martha's request reasonable?
2. What does Jesus' response to Martha reveal about priorities?
3. Do you feel more like Mary or Martha?

Martha's lesson. Martha is busy being a responsible host to Jesus and all of his followers. Jesus' response to Martha reveals that taking time with Him is even more important than doing good things for Him.

Jesus Chooses the 12 Disciples. Mark 3:14-15; Luke 6:12-13

1. Why does Jesus call the disciples?
2. How does Jesus decide who to invite to be on his ministry team?
3. What are the obstacles that stop you from spending time with God on a regular basis?
How can you overcome these?



Jesus calls the disciples to be with Him. The disciples can only get to know Jesus by being with Him. Then they can represent Him well to others and carry out His ministry.

Jesus spends time with God. Prior to the calling of the disciples, Jesus spends the night praying. Throughout His ministry, Jesus relies on the Father for guidance – for what to say and what to do (Luke 5:15-16; John 5:19, 12:49-50). As leaders, our wisdom, direction, and empowering for ministry will come directly from our close times with God.

Created to know God. God's greatest desire for us is that we know and love Him as a friend, not just serve Him (Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:3; John 15:15). The deepest desire of great leaders in the Bible - like Moses, David and Paul - was to know God. (Exodus 33:11,13; Psalm 63:1-4; Philippians 3:8-10)

B. WAYS TO GROW IN FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

The following areas are all parts of building a close relationship with God. We grow this friendship in a similar way that we do with other people.

TALKING to God in prayer. Matthew 6:5-13

1. What does Jesus teach about how *not* to pray?
2. What are we to include in our prayers ?



How to pray. Don't pray in such a way to impress others, but come to God in humility. Speak from your heart. The Lord's Prayer is a useful guide for what to include as we pray:

- *God* – praise God for who He is.
- *Others* – pray for others and for God's ways to be brought about on the earth.
- *Yourself* – ask God to provide for your daily needs, to forgive any sins, and to help avoid temptation.

LISTENING to God speak to us. Acts 11:4-16

1. What different ways do you see God speaking in this story?
2. In what ways has God spoken to you?



God speaks in different ways. Friendship involves not just talking, but also listening (John 10:27). In this story, God brings conviction and guidance to Peter through a *vision* (sometimes God uses dreams). *The inner voice of the Holy Spirit* directs him to go with the visitors. Then God uses Peter, a *godly believer*, to encourage Cornelius with an invitation to God's family. God reminds Peter of the words Jesus spoke (which comes to us now through *the Bible*). *An angel* also appears delivering a message to Cornelius (this is a less common way for God to speak).

Practice is needed. Learning to hear God speak takes practice. Begin to obey His gentle stirrings and you will find His voice becoming easier to discern. Just like in a noisy room, the closer you get to someone, the easier it is to hear them. So it is with God – the closer you get to Him, the easier it is to hear.

Agreement with the Bible. God will never speak to us something that does not agree with the teaching in the Bible. God's speaking will produce the fruit of the Spirit and bring glory to His name. James 3:17

THINKING ABOUT God and His Word.

1. What are the benefits of Bible meditation (thinking deeply about God's Word)?
Philippians 4:8; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 119:9-11, 97-99



Benefits of Bible meditation. Focusing on truth helps to clear away negative thinking. It builds faith. It helps us grow in wisdom, character and in conquering sin. It results in fruitfulness in our lives.

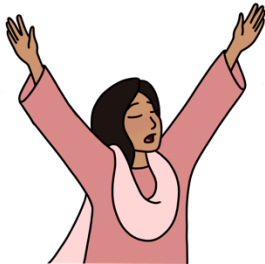
Ways to keep God's Word before you. (Optional)

- Post Scriptures around your home.
- Listen to Scripture in songs.
- Use Scriptures in your prayers and to guide your prayers.

- Listen to an audio Bible as you go about your day.
- Memorize Scripture that helps with struggles you are having.

ADMIRING God.

1. What benefits came as Israel worshipped in faith? 2 Chronicles 20:1,18-22, 27-30



Worship overcomes obstacles. Worship is appreciating and thanking God for who He is and what He is accomplishing even in difficult times (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). As Israel worshipped despite their fear, their faith in God was built. They overcame fear and despair. They received peace and joy. They were victorious over their enemies. See also Isaiah 61:3-4; Psalm 18:3; Psalm 63:1-5.



Reflection Questions

1. As a leader, do you regularly spend the time needed to seek God and His wisdom, encouragement and direction?
2. Is there something from this lesson that would be good for you to include as you strengthen your friendship with God?



Application Activity

Spend time with God. Select a passage of Scripture, then follow the guide below as you spend time with God. Some Scriptures to choose from: Psalm 27:1-14; Psalm 91:1-16; Psalm 139:1-18.

Pray

- Find a quiet place and invite the Lord to come and meet with you.
- Pray following the Lord's Prayer – praise *God*, pray for *others* and then *yourself*.

Read and reflect

- Read and reread a Scripture passage with an open heart. You may want to underline any words that are repeated or important.
- Reflect (meditate) on the words and meaning of the passage. Note: For a more accurate understanding of the meaning of the selected Scripture, you may want to read the verses or chapter before and after the passage.
- Wait and listen: Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal truth and bring conviction.

Apply

- Ask yourself: How will I live differently today because of this time with God? Is there a truth to believe? A sin to repent of? A promise to claim? An example to follow?
- Journal: It may be helpful to record your thoughts, feelings or any action steps.

Thank

- Thank God for being with you. Ask Him to help you live for Him today



Further Study (Optional)

Some creative ways to connect with God

1. *Pray out the Scriptures* - use the words of Scripture as a guide for your prayers. Example, Psalm 23
2. *Sing the Scriptures*. Rewrite your favorite worship song. Put your own words to the melody. Sing this song to God.

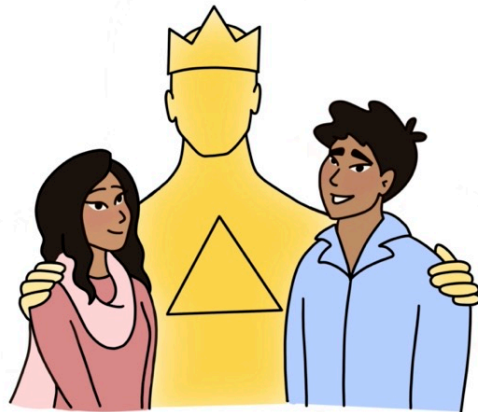
3. *Rewrite a psalm.* Choose one that speaks to you (of hope, despair, thanks, request for help...) Using the structure of the psalm, record in your journal your own words to it. Pray your psalm out.
4. *Make Scripture into art.* Create art inspired by your favorite Bible story or verse.
5. *Experience God's creation.* Go for a walk in nature. Pay close attention to details. Touch, listen, smell. Praise God for His incredible power, creativity and beauty.



Poster Description

We were created to enjoy a close friendship with God. Growing that friendship involves regularly talking and listening to Him, learning about Him and His will through His Word, and expressing our appreciation and love to Him.

Growing in Friendship with God



We were created for
friendship with God

ADMIRING
God



TALKING
to God



THINKING
about God
and His Word



LISTENING
to God speak



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The Value and Design of People

Summary: God created people in His likeness and, therefore, all people are equal in worth. Regardless of race, gender, age, or position, every person is highly valuable and individually unique. We are all wonderfully designed with the ability to think, choose and feel in order to have meaningful friendship with God and others, and to care for the earth.

A. ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN

Creation of Adam and Eve. Genesis 1:26-28

1. How does God create Adam and Eve? What is their purpose?

Made in the image of God. God creates Adam and Eve as the climax of His creation with a special design and purpose. He delights in making two distinct and complementary genders, male and female, both created in the image and likeness of God. They are created for the purpose of close friendship with Him and others, and to care for God's creation.

Eve Created as Equal Partner. Genesis 2:18-25

1. Why does God use the rib of Adam in creating Eve?

The perfect companion for Adam. By naming the animals, Adam realizes his own need for a partner. Eve is specially designed by God to be the perfect fit for Adam. (See the Further Study section for more on this.) God uses one of Adam's ribs (from his side) to create Eve, as a reminder that the woman and the man are to be side-by-side companions, equal in value. Having the same special abilities and purpose, they are to work together as a unified team in marriage (one man and one woman).

The Freedom of Choice. Genesis 2:9, 16-17

1. Why does God place the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the middle of the Garden?



Trusting God's kindness. Eden in Hebrew means 'delight'. The garden, a place of beauty and abundance, is given for Adam and Eve's enjoyment. They experience great delight as they walk closely with God without the effects of sin.

With the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil positioned in the middle of the Garden, Adam and Eve discover their freedom of moral choice (choosing right or wrong). They can trust in God's loving intentions and heart towards them which will result in obeying Him and not eating the fruit (knowing good), rather than disobeying Him (knowing evil). The severe consequence of death connected to disobeying God reveals how

important this choice of life is (loving and trusting God above all else).

A Special Design. Genesis 2:7-9, 15-23

1. Discuss how Adam and Eve's special abilities of the mind, will and emotions should work together to obey God.

Using their special abilities. God designs Adam and Eve with an outer physical body and an inner spirit, made alive by God's own breath (Gen 2:7). This invisible inner part includes the mind, will and emotions. God desires for Adam and Eve, like all people, to love Him supremely with their whole being (Mark 12:30). With their mind, they are able to understand what is right and wrong (based on what God says about the Tree.) With their will, they are able to choose to do what they know is right (not eat of the Tree). Their emotions (reactions to the desirable fruit) influence their choices. Emotions can have a strong positive or negative influence, but we can always choose to act rightly (Matthew 5:43-45). Others can also influence us towards good or evil.

B. THE HIGH VALUE OF ALL PEOPLE

The Samaritan Woman at the Well. John 4:5-19, 27-30, 39 **

1. Why does the Samaritan woman come to draw water from the well at the hottest time of the day (4:6)?
2. Why is the Samaritan woman surprised that Jesus asks her to give Him a drink from her water jar?
3. How does Jesus meet this woman's greatest need?

Jesus shows acceptance of the outcast woman. The Samaritan woman is a mixed race which Jews despised. Women were also treated unequally and overlooked in Jewish culture. Jewish religious leaders would also stay away from sinners like this adulterous woman. Jesus, who is a Jew, a man and a Rabbi (a teacher of God's ways), goes out of His way and against His culture to show honor to this shamed woman. He shows her the love and acceptance she fails to find from her past broken relationships and from her community (the woman came to draw water at the hottest time of the day when no one else was around). As Jesus values and accepts her, her life is impacted and she becomes the first missionary in the Gospels.

Every Person Is Highly Valuable.

1. Why treat everyone equally? Matthew 19:13-15; Galatians 3:28. (Deuteronomy 1:16-17)
2. Discuss if there are people who are treated as inferior in your culture. (Consider race, language, gender, age, position or wealth.) How can you influence your community to value others more?



Treating others with value. All people are highly and equally valuable because they are made in the image of God. Therefore, we are to treat others equally and fairly regardless of their race, gender, age, position, deformity, education, birth order or wealth.

God loves all languages and cultures. Every culture reveals God's fingerprint – aspects of His character, creativity and diversity. Although each culture has parts that need reforming, God welcomes and celebrates every tribe, language and culture. (Revelation 7:9-12)

Every Person Is Individually Unique and Special. Psalm 139:13-15

1. How does God see you? Do you live in this truth rather than the lies of others or Satan?

Wonderfully made. Each person is wonderfully made by God. Our bodies, our skin colour and our personalities are beautiful in the eyes of God. Each of us reveal a unique aspect of God's creativity. Like the woman at the well, Jesus shows that all are special and valuable in God's eyes. No matter what we have done, what people say about us, or even how we feel about ourselves, we are still loved and highly treasured by God.



Reflection Questions

1. Do you use your understanding of right and wrong to guide your choices? Or do you allow your emotions to influence your actions and responses in a negative way?
2. Do you treat your spouse and children with value, as gifts from God?



Application Activity (2 options)

Reaching out in compassion. Is there someone you can think of who is a different race, gender, age or status than you that God may be asking you to reach out to? What is one action you can take to show them compassion and care?

Affirming the value in others. Be imitators of Jesus in honoring everyone. In small groups (recommended that women and men be separate), encourage each person in the group. Affirm things that you see that are special. Affirm their uniqueness and high value. When you go home, do the same with your spouse and children.



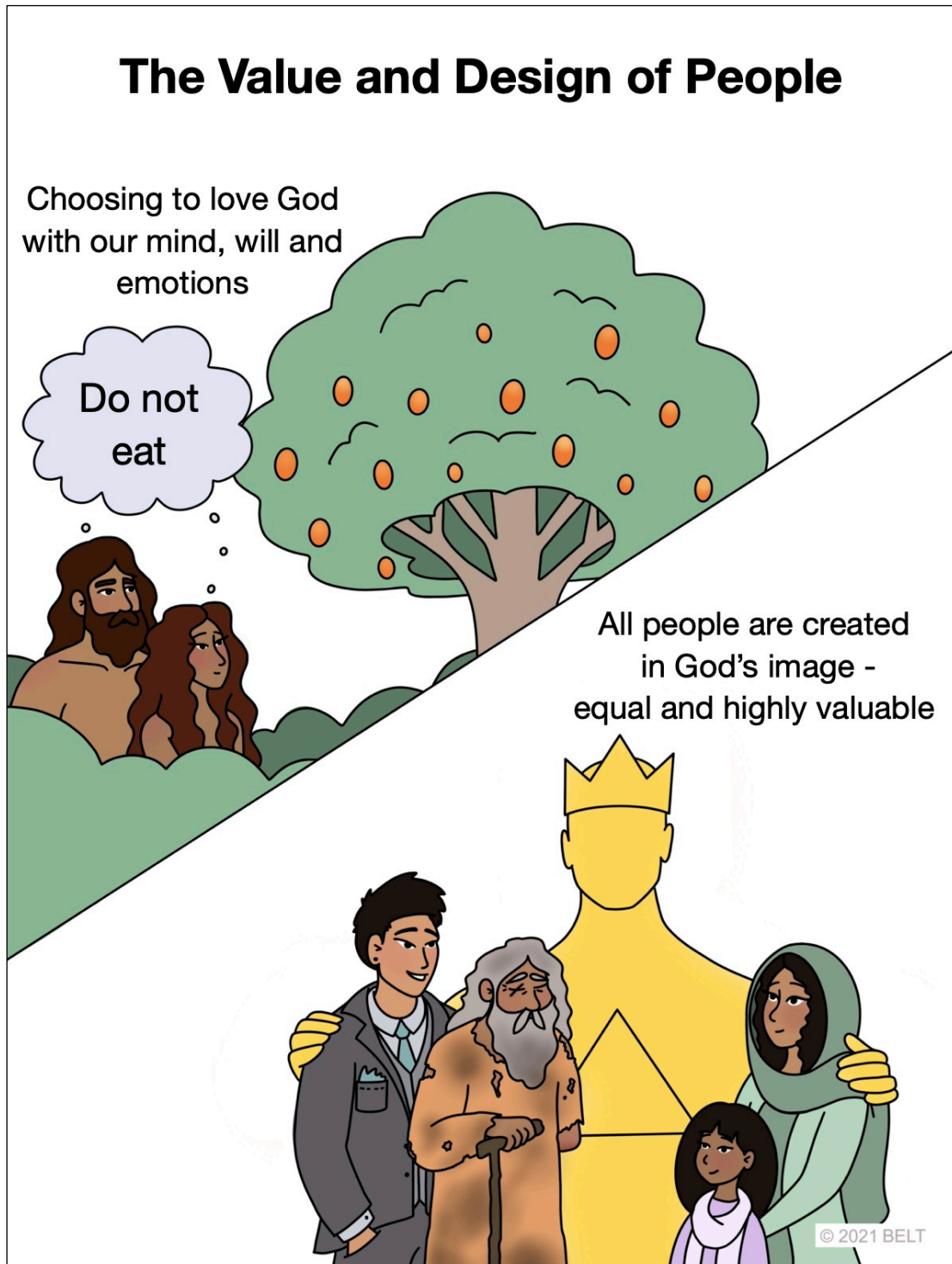
Further Study (Optional)

1. **Eve is a suitable helper for Adam.** In Genesis 2:18, the term 'helper' (the Hebrew word *ezer*) does not mean a lesser role or status. This same word is used in the Bible to describe God as our Helper when He comes to us in our need – the stronger one helping the weaker (Psalm 33:20; 70:5; 115:9-11; 121:1–2). The term 'suitable' means Eve is the right fit or complement to Adam. God makes Eve as an equal and perfect partner for Adam, together able to fulfil their created purpose.
2. **God governs His creation according to its design.** Physical creation works by physical laws (example, the law of gravity). Animals and living creatures are directed by set behaviors called the law of instinct (example, a spider spins the same kind of web). Only people (made in the image of God and of highest value - Luke 12:24; Matthew 12:12a) are designed to live by moral laws. We have the intelligence and freedom of moral choice to know and obey the laws of right and wrong written on our hearts (conscience) and revealed in the Bible. Therefore, we are responsible for our choices and actions. God uses kindness and truth, as well as natural consequences (positive or negative), to influence us to make right choices.



Poster Description

God created us in His image, uniquely designed with a mind, will, and emotions to fully enjoy friendship with Him and others. Our decisions and actions should be based on our understanding of right and wrong (Adam and Eve looking at the Tree thinking about God's command). Our emotions influence us but should not direct our choices (reactions to the desirable fruit). Others can encourage or discourage us in this process, and may also be affected by our choices. Being created in the image of God, each person is equal and highly valuable, regardless of race (Samaritan woman), gender (woman and man), age (old man / child), position or wealth (business man / beggar) or physical deformity (beggar with no arm).



God's Laws of Love

Summary: The Ten Commandments show how God's universal law of love can be lived out by all people. By His example, Jesus shows us how to live by God's law of love. He summarizes it as loving God supremely and loving others as ourselves. Living by this law of love brings safety, happiness and freedom to individuals and their communities.

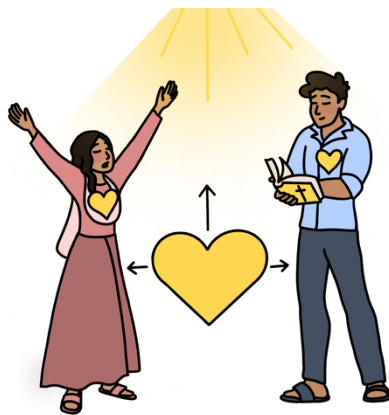
A. LIVING BY LOVE

The Good Samaritan. Luke 10:25-37 **

1. Why would this story be shocking to the Jewish listeners?
2. How can you be a good Samaritan to those despised in your community?

The Samaritan's compassion. The Levite and priest, who both know the law of God, should have showed kindness to another Jew. But they walk away. Surprisingly, it is the Samaritan who responds in compassion. He helps the man in need, even though Jews despise Samaritans. God's desire is that we likewise demonstrate His love with everyone around us, even those different from us or looked down on by our community.

How we can love others. Loving others is an outflow of experiencing God's love. If we hate others, it is an indication that we don't love or know God. 1 John 4:7, 19-21; John 15:12-13



God's Law of Love. Matthew 22:36-40

1. How do Jesus and Paul summarize the Old Testament requirements? Matthew 22:36-40; Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:8-10
2. Review what love is and how it is the source of all that God does.

The fulfillment of God's law. Jesus summarizes the Old Testament rules for living (called the Law and the Prophets by the Jews) as love God the most and love others as yourself. He further describes the second command (called the Golden Rule) as treat others in the same way you want to be treated. Paul similarly says that living by love is the fulfillment of God's law. God Himself lives by this law of love which is given for all people, at all times, and in all locations.

B. THE BLESSING OF LIVING BY GOD'S LAWS OF LOVE

God Gives the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Exodus 19:1-19; 20:18-20

1. What happens just prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments?
2. Why does God make this special event so dramatic?

Heart commitment comes first. God and Israel agree to be in close friendship together. Israel's heart commitment to love and obey God comes before God gives the commandments of how to live. (Exodus 19:3-8)

The foundations of a righteous and just nation. From the top of the mountain ablaze with fire and smoke, God speaks aloud the Ten Commandments to His people. He emphasizes the importance of these foundational laws (a written constitution for their new nation) that would protect them by maintaining justice and freedom for all people. Moses encourages the people to always love and respect God (the fear of the Lord). From this internal heart attitude, they would be able to obey these laws (Exodus 20:18-20).

The Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:1-17

1. Explain each commandment.
2. How do these commands show love, and protect people and their communities?

First four commandments are about LOVING GOD

1. *Have no other gods.* Make God your highest priority. This protects God's proper place in our lives.
2. *Do not make and worship idols.* Don't worship God by creating idols to represent Him (as was done in Egypt and other nations). This protects the correct view and worship of God.
3. *Do not dishonor God's name* (by our words or actions). This promotes respect for God and protects His reputation.
4. *Keep the Sabbath holy.* Sabbath means to rest from work one day each week. Holy means set apart for God. Prioritize rest from our normal routine to focus on God. This protects ourselves from weariness and protects the correct priority of life - friendship with God.



Last six commandments are about LOVING OTHERS

5. *Honor your parents.* This protects respect for authority in the family and society. As children we are to obey our parents, but as adults we are to obey God first while honoring our parents.
6. *Do not murder.* This protects the high value of life (since all are made in the image of God).
7. *Do not commit adultery (or other sexual sins).* This protects marriage, the family and our personal lives (from diseases, emotional pain, broken families, etc.).
8. *Do not steal.* This protects the right to own and enjoy property and provides the opportunity for financial prosperity.
9. *Do not lie or distort the truth.* This protects people's reputations and preserves justice in court.
10. *Do not covet (desire what others have).* This protects our hearts and relationships by being content and grateful for what we have.

Valuing God's laws from the heart. Matthew 5:17-22; 5:27-30

Jesus did not come to do away with God's laws but to reveal how to live them out in love (to fulfill them). God's intention in giving His laws is not so people just obey external rules, like the Pharisees were doing (Matthew 5:20). He wants us to deal with the connected inner heart issues (anger leads to murder; lust leads to adultery) that lead to damaging actions.

*"The person who loves others has done all that the law commands."
Romans 13:8*

Living by God's Laws Brings Blessing. Deuteronomy 30:11-20

1. How would it be possible for the Israelites to obey God's laws?
2. What does God promise to those who obey His laws?

Blessings and curses. Before Moses dies, he reminds the Israelites how they should live in order for them to prosper in the land they were about to settle in. He believes the Israelites could choose to live by God's wise and loving laws (they were not too difficult) when they love God deeply from the heart (Deuteronomy 30:16, 20). If they do this, they would experience safety, long life and prosperity (blessings) in their own individual lives and in their nation. If they turn away from the law of love, negative consequences (curses) would naturally result. (See James 1:25)



Reflection Questions

1. Which commandment do you personally find the most difficult to obey?
2. What is the heart issue connected to this struggle? Pray with someone about that.



Application Activity

Rebuild a fence of protection in your community. Gather in groups according to communities. Which one of the Ten Commandments is most often broken in your community or village? What lies are believed that lead to this? Discuss the blessings that would come if this command was observed. Plan one or two practical things that can be done after the seminar to promote change in your community. Pray and listen to God about these things.



Further Study (Optional)

Following God's example of love and holiness. When we walk in love and in the light as God does, we increasingly do what we know to be good, true and right (Ephesians 5:1-10; 1 John 1:5-7). Holy living includes *immediately obeying* the truth we know (1 Peter 1:14-16). It is also *the process of growing in maturity* and understanding how to live by love. By imitating God, we can have friendship with Him and more accurately show His beauty to the world around us.



Poster Description

As our designer, God knows how we best function – alone and in community. The Ten Commandments describe how to live by love and wisdom. (The yellow heart means “do this because you love God”. The black heart means “don’t do this – it is destructive”.) The first four commands (in yellow circles) are about loving God (shown as yellow light) supremely. The last six are about loving others. These laws are based on truth and reality (holding the Bible) and protect (fence) our relationships and make our communities safe and free.



The Root of Sin

Summary: The heart is the center of our being and the root (source) of our external actions. God evaluates our lives as righteous or sinful based on our heart - loving God or ourselves supremely.

A. THE ENTRANCE OF SIN INTO THE WORLD

The Sin of Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:1-13, 20-24 **

1. Does Eve (and Adam) know it is wrong to eat the fruit? Explain. Where is Adam when Eve eats the fruit?
2. What do we learn about temptation and sin from this story?

The process of temptation. Satan deceives Eve by twisting the truth to create doubt in Eve's mind about God's loving character. She believes that God is withholding something good from her. She believes Satan's lies and is tempted to satisfy her desires in a forbidden way. Tragically, Eve and Adam (who was beside her and said nothing) sin by knowingly disobeying God's command by eating the fruit. They choose to do what they know is wrong. God holds Adam and Eve responsible for their disobedience and disciplines them for their sin (Genesis 3:16-19). God sadly removes them from the delightful Garden and the Tree of Life so that they will not continue in sin forever.

Other Scriptures about Temptation and Sin.

1. What else does the Bible say about temptation and where it comes from?
James 1:13-15; 1 Corinthians 10:13
2. What can we learn about sin from 1 John 3:4 and James 4:17?

The difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is an appeal to our mind to satisfy our desires in a wrong way. Though Satan tries to deceive us by twisting the truth, it is our own desires that pull us in the wrong direction (James 1:14). We sin when we give into temptation. But God is available to help us to resist and always offers a way out.

Sin is knowingly breaking God's laws of love (doing what we know is wrong). A sinful person continuously lives for himself rather than living for God.



B. JESUS REBUKES RELIGIOUS LEADERS

The Hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Matthew 5:20; Matthew 23:1-7, 25-28; Mark 7:5-6

1. Why does Jesus say that the religious Pharisees would not enter the Kingdom of God? How does Jesus describe their hearts?
2. Why do the Pharisees do all their "righteous" deeds?

The Pharisees outward righteousness. Although the Pharisees do religious activities, their hearts are far away from God and unclean. They do everything for selfish reasons – to be seen and

admired by others. For their external behavior to be seen as righteous by God, they must first clean or change their hearts (the root of their actions). But the Pharisees are unwilling to repent and come to God (Matthew 23:37).

*The Rich Young Ruler. Mark 10:17-27 ***

1. What is the rich man wanting to know?
2. What is the one thing that the man is lacking?

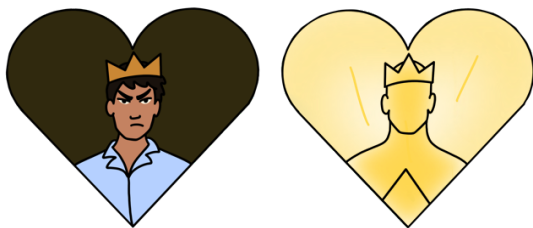
The one thing lacking. The rich man, most likely a leader from the local synagogue, is seeking how to have eternal life. He observed the Ten Commandments from his youth, but one thing is stopping him from having eternal life. The rich man's love for his money is greater than his love for Jesus. It is impossible for him to be saved by his good deeds and without a change of loyalty (as it is impossible for a camel to fit through the tiny eye of a needle). Elsewhere, Jesus teaches that we will either love God supremely or wealth (worldly pleasures), but we cannot serve both (Luke 16:13-15).

“What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil comes....”
Mark 7:20

C. HOW GOD EVALUATES PEOPLE'S LIVES

Two Types of people. Matthew 7:15-23

1. Compare the two types of trees and the two types of people?
2. What is God saying about where sin is evaluated?



Our supreme choice of life. Just as a tree will produce a certain type of fruit, so a good tree will produce good fruit. A bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Likewise, a person who loves God (good heart) will increasingly produce the fruit of good actions (as he grows in his understanding of God's ways). A selfish person (bad heart) is living for himself, even though he may say or do some good things (even

religious things like the Pharisees). So then God evaluates our actions and our lives by our heart – our supreme choice to live for Him or for ourselves.

Other Scriptures describing how God evaluates our lives. (Optional)

- 1 Samuel 16:6-7. God chose David as king based on his heart, not his external appearance or abilities.
- Mark 7:18-23. It is not what we eat or drink that makes us unclean, but what comes out of our hearts. All evil actions come from a selfish heart.



Reflection Questions

1. What we say and do shows the condition of our heart (Luke 6:45-46). Honestly evaluate your own heart and ask the Holy Spirit to expose and convict you of any sin or selfishness (2

Corinthians 13:5). Consider what you do in secret as well as how you speak and act towards others, especially towards your spouse and your children.

2. Evaluate your motivation for being in ministry. Are you in ministry or leadership because you love God and want to serve others? Or is it because you want a position, power, or recognition (like the Pharisees)?



Application Activity

Sharing your temptations. Choose one or two people you feel comfortable sharing with (men and women separately). Share an area you are struggling in and then pray for victory for each other. Sharing our struggles humbly and honestly with others (bringing them into the light) is the first step to freedom. Don't share what others say outside the group.



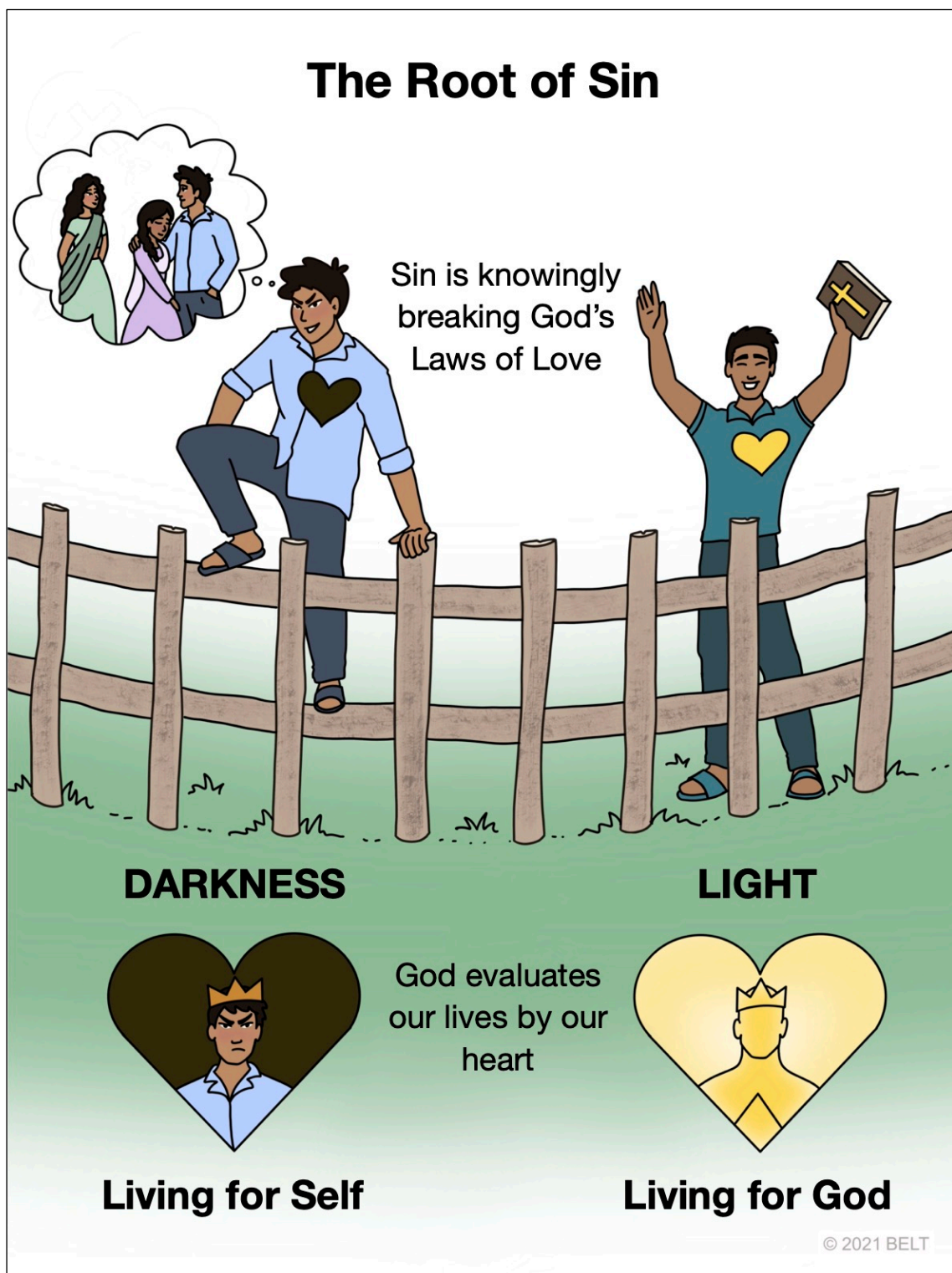
Further Study (Optional)

1. **God tests us.** God never tempts us to sin (James 1:13). But God can test us by putting challenges in our lives to encourage growth in godly character. (Genesis 22:1; Deuteronomy 8:2).
2. **Three common temptations.** The forbidden tree in the Garden is a temptation to Eve in three ways. The fruit looks desirable and is also good for food, and it would make her wise like God (Genesis 3:6). Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness in similar ways. Jesus resists each temptation by immediately speaking the truth from the Word of God (Matthew 4:1-11). These three common temptations that pull us away from God (1 John 2:15-16) relate to:
 - The body – desire for physical pleasures (food, sex) outside of God's wise boundaries
 - The eyes – excessive desire for material things (money, possessions)
 - The pride of life – desiring position (reputation, power) for personal gain rather than to serve others



Poster Description

God designed us to live by His law of love (man inside fence). Temptation is an appeal to our mind (thought cloud) to do what we know is wrong. We sin when we knowingly break God's laws of love (man climbing over fence). A person who loves God (God in yellow heart) lives in the light and increasingly produces the fruit of good actions. If we live for ourselves (man with crown in black heart), we are living in darkness - no matter how good our actions may seem. God evaluates our lives by our heart - the supreme choice to live for Him or ourselves.



The Destructiveness of Sin

Summary: Sin is a crime against God and others. It goes against our created design and purpose. It results in negative and sometimes devastating consequences to ourselves, our families, and other relationships. It always causes immense grief to the heart of God.

A. SIN SPREADS AND SPOILS THE EARTH

*The Tragic Results of Adam and Eve's Sin. Genesis 3:1-13, 20-24 ***

1. What are the consequences when Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit?
2. Why does God expel Adam and Eve from the garden?
3. How does God respond to Adam and Eve's sin?



Paradise is lost. The perfect Garden home and face-to-face relationship with God are both gone forever. For the first time, Adam and Eve experience guilt and fear (as they now hide from the One they previously would seek). Instead of taking responsibility for their actions when God questions them, Adam blames Eve (damaging that relationship) and Eve blames the Serpent (hardening her heart). Now they will experience hardships, sorrow and death as God painfully must expel them from His presence, the Garden and the Tree of Life (limiting the sin they can do if they live forever).

Despite this, God continues to care for Adam and Eve by providing clothing to cover their shame. And He gives them a promise – that one day, the Messiah would come and destroy all evil and all darkness and would make the broken and dying world new again (3:15). God's love and commitment to Adam and Eve's descendants would never end.

Cain Kills Abel. Genesis 4:1-13

1. What does God tell Cain to do about his growing anger?
2. Why does God give Cain such a severe punishment (4:13)?

Lives and dreams are destroyed. The promising future God desired for both Cain and Abel will not ever be experienced. God tries to protect Cain and Abel by encouraging Cain to overcome his feelings of anger. Instead, Cain gives into temptation, and selfishly destroys the life of his innocent brother. God disciplines Cain severely to show the seriousness of his actions (revealing God's high value of life). Cain shows no sorrow nor takes any responsibility for his evil actions which reveals Cain's hardness of heart. God's punishment (which now requires much effort for Cain to search for food as he wanders the earth) limits the damage Cain can do if he persists in wicked behavior.

Great Wickedness at the Time of the Flood. Genesis 6:5-13

1. How does the Bible describe what people were like at the time of the flood?
2. What can we learn from Noah in this story?
3. What do we learn about how God responds to sin and wickedness?

The earth is ruined. The once flawless earth now becomes “full of violence” (there is no safety or freedom). Every person is totally selfish and wicked all the time (6:5). Noah chooses not to give in to sin despite the overwhelming evil influences around him. God is deeply grieved (not angry), that the earth had become so spoiled and contrary to what He had ever intended (6:6). God patiently waits while He uses Noah as a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5) for up to 100 years while he builds the ark, in hopes that some repent. Then God justly puts a stop to the persistent and destructive wickedness. God preserves Noah, through which He ultimately sends a Savior whose love would transform lives to make the world a better place.

*“Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence.”
Genesis 6:11*

B. SIN BREAKS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD AND OTHERS

The Tragic Story of Amnon and Tamar. 2 Samuel 13:1-22, 28-29 (full story - 2 Sam 13:1-39)

1. What destructive results of sin do you see in this story of Amnon and Tamar?
2. Share examples of destructive results of sin in families.

Tamar’s life is shattered. Amnon allows his lust for Tamar, his half-sister, to grow and consume him (bondage and misery). Amnon selfishly and wickedly violates Tamar and destroys her reputation and her life (emotional wounding). Absalom, Tamar’s full brother, hates Amnon and in revenge murders him (physical death) and has to flee the country (broken family).

Sin’s tragic consequences.

Shame and guilt – when we sin, we feel dirty and ashamed and tend to separate ourselves from God and others. People may also distance themselves from us.



Broken relationships – people living in sin will hurt others around them.

Physical and emotional wounds – selfishness and evil actions can leave shame and scars that can hurt individuals and their relationships for a life-time. This brokenness and feelings of rejection may also lead to suicidal thoughts and self-harm.

Bondage and misery – when we sin, we become “slaves to sin”, which increasingly ensnares us. This results in greater misery for ourselves and others, and can lead to destructive habits and addictions. (John 8:34; Romans 6:16-23; Romans 7:14-15, 23-24)

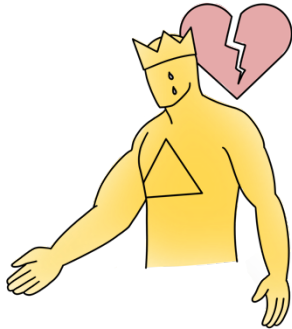
Death – every consequence of sin leads to “death” or separation (Genesis 2:17). When we sin, our *relationship with God is broken* (spiritual death). As a result of sin entering the world, all people will one day experience *physical death*. If an unrepentant sinner dies, he will be separated from God forever.

In hell, a place reserved for Satan and those who reject God, he will experience terrible suffering, loneliness and the sorrow of regret. (Matthew 13:40-42; Revelation 21:8)

C. THE WORST RESULT OF SIN IS THE PAIN IT CAUSES GOD

God's Response to Israel's Sin.

1. What is God's expectation for His cherished grapevine, Israel? Isaiah 5:1-7
2. How does Israel's idolatry and sin affect God? Psalm 78:32-41; Ezekiel 6:9



God grieves over Israel's betrayal. In the song of God's vineyard, God lovingly prepares everything for His cherished plant, Israel, to be fruitful in the land. He expects good fruit, but instead finds the bitter fruit of injustice and misery. With great disappointment and grief arising from unmet expectations, God declares, "What more could I have done?" As a husband or wife is deeply hurt by the betrayal of their unfaithful spouse, so God is grieved by the betrayal and persistent rebellion of His beloved people Israel.

God grieves over our sin. Our Heavenly Father delights in each one of us and has wonderful plans for us. Like a loving parent who grieves over a wayward child, so God grieves over rebellious sinners. He is pained not only over the loss of relationship, but over the destructive consequences to those He loves.



Reflection Questions

1. Consider the destructive consequences and impact of sin on your life and relationships.
2. Consider the impact of your sin on Father God who loves you the most and has so many dreams and hopes for your life.



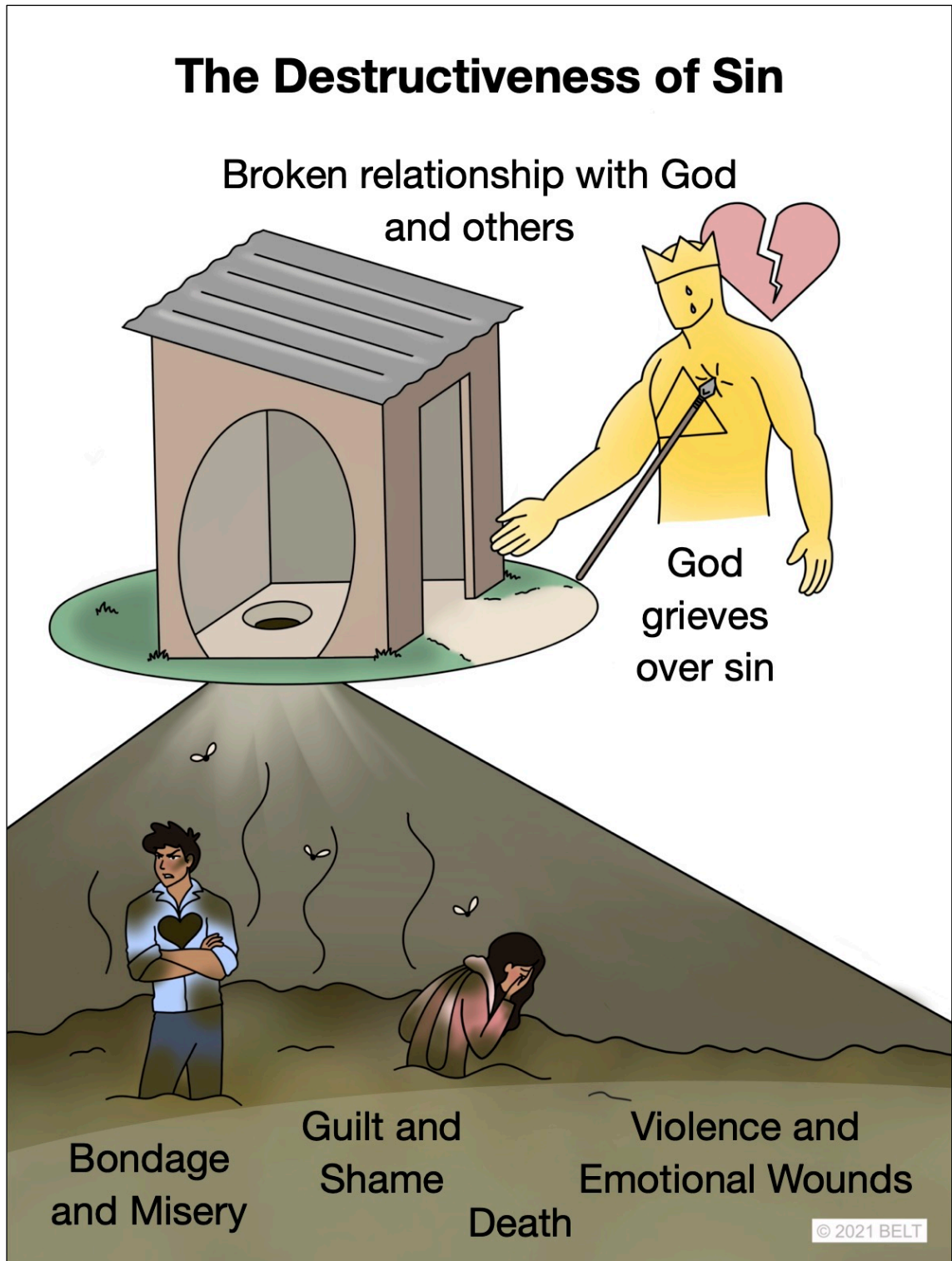
Application Activity

Write a letter (or a song) to God. Find a place to be alone. Think about how Israel's sin affected God (Psalm 78:36-41). Ask God to show you how He sees your sin and how your sin impacts Him. Write a letter to God or come up with your own song or poem describing what God is revealing to you. You may want to begin with describing God's goodness to you in the past. Then share how your sin has affected God and brought destructive consequences to you. Finish by describing your desired response to God. Share your letter, poem or song with a friend.



Poster Description

When we break God's law of love, our relationship with God and others is broken (torn heart). There are many painful consequences that result. We and others are hurt. We become stuck in our sin (people chained to posts). God grieves (tears) over the terrible results on the people He loves. But in His great mercy, God continues to reach out to rebellious and unclean sinners (backs turned away from God on pile of filthy rubbish).



The Kindness of God in Salvation

Summary: God is grieved over sin and the devastating consequences it brings to those He loves. Yet the amazing mercy and kindness of God is demonstrated in Jesus coming to rescue people from their rebellion and sin. In the greatest act of love ever displayed, Jesus willingly suffered on the cross. He is the final sacrifice for sin, so sinners might willingly turn from their selfishness and live for Him.

A. THE PURPOSE OF JESUS COMING

Jesus Goes to the House of Zaccheus. Luke 19:1-10 **

1. Why do the Jews not like the tax collectors?
2. Why do you think Zaccheus has a change of heart?

Jesus befriends an outcast sinner. The Jewish tax collectors were becoming rich by overcharging their own people the required Roman taxes. Jesus befriends the despised tax collector Zaccheus which results in his changed life. No longer is Zaccheus seeking his own gain but becomes overly generous in repaying his wrongs.

Joseph's dream about Jesus. Matthew 1:18-23

1. What two names are given for the promised child? What do these names reveal about Jesus?

God rescues us. The names of Jesus reveal who He is and the purpose of His coming. Immanuel means God is with us. Jesus means God saves. The coming of Jesus is to rescue and restore sinners to Himself – what God had been working towards since the first sin of Adam and Eve.

*“You are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”
Matthew 1:21*

B. GOD DESIRES TO FORGIVE SINNERS

The Woman Caught in Adultery. John 8:1-11 **

1. How do the Pharisees treat the woman caught in adultery? How does Jesus treat the woman?
2. What impact do you think Jesus' response had on the woman?

Jesus throws no stone. The woman is being used by the Pharisees to trap Jesus. (The Law requires both the man and woman involved in adultery to die - Deuteronomy 22:22.) Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (who are also sinners). But He shows kindness to the woman (though He does not excuse her sin). Jesus' act of mercy would have had a powerful influence on the adulterous woman to change her sinful ways.

God Sends Jonah to Nineveh. Jonah 3:1-10; 4:1-4, 11

1. Why is Jonah so angry when the Ninevites repent of their sin?
2. What does Jonah know about the character of God that makes him want to flee to Tarshish?

God forgives Nineveh's sin. Jonah believes the wicked and cruel Ninevites deserve the judgment of God. But Jonah knows God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, and willing to forgive. So he flees rather than giving the Ninevites an opportunity to repent and be forgiven.

God urges repentance so He can forgive. As with the Ninevites, God does not want to bring judgment on sinners He greatly loves. He urges them to repent so He can forgive their sin (Psalm 86:5; Ezekiel 18:29-32; 2 Peter 3:9). But for God to wisely forgive, sinners need to turn from all known sin and make a heart commitment to live for Him above all else.

C. JESUS WILLINGLY LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE

Jesus, the Lamb of God. Exodus 12:21-23; 1 Corinthians 5:7; John 10:14-18; 15:13

1. What is John referring to when he calls Jesus the Lamb of God? (John 1:29)
2. Why does Jesus willingly lay His life down for us?



The final sin offering. The first Passover in Egypt, the blood of a sacrificed lamb rescues the Israelites from death. This points towards another Lamb that would come to rescue us from spiritual death. Jesus willingly goes to the cross to be the sacrificial “lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Jesus’ death is the final sin offering whereby God can wisely forgive (take away) our sins and restore us back to fellowship with Himself. (1 Peter 2:21-25; Hebrews 9:25-26)

Influence to change. The cross is the greatest display of God’s love and kindness to the undeserving sinner. It is the strongest possible influence to humble proud hearts, so that we might repent of sin and live for God. It is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. Romans 2:4

The Crucifixion of Jesus. Read (and/or dramatize) the following:

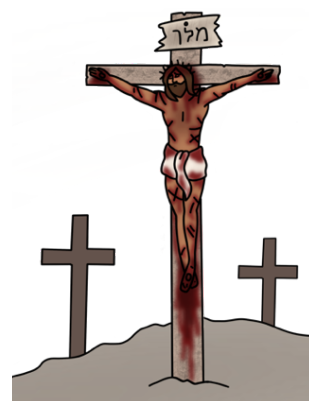
1. The trial by the Jews. Matthew 26:57-68
2. The whipping by the Roman soldiers. Matthew 27:26-31
3. On the cross. Matthew 27:33-44; Luke 23:34; Luke 23:39-43
4. Jesus’ death. Matthew 27:45-54

The trial before the Jewish council. The Jewish leaders want Jesus dead. He is a threat to their way of life. So when Jesus acknowledges that He is the Messiah and the Son of God (Mark 14:62), Caiaphas, the high priest, charges Jesus with blasphemy (a charge against a person claiming to be God, punishable by death).

Roman whipping. The Romans use a whip which has several thick strips of leather with sharp pieces of metal or bone on the end. The shoulders and back are repeatedly struck by the weighted leather strips, eventually cutting through the skin to the deeper blood vessels. This causes massive blood loss and leaves the skin of the back hanging in ribbons of torn flesh. Whipping continues until it is determined that the victim is close to death.

A crown of thorns. The very sharp thorns on the crown (at least 30mm long and very sharp) struck into Jesus' head would have caused immense pain and profuse bleeding.

Roman crucifixion. Crucifixion is one of the most cruel and painful ways to die. Long iron nails are hammered through each wrist and through the feet into the cross. As the victim's bodyweight pulls downward, growing pressure on the nailed wrists sends pain shooting through the arms and chest. In order to breathe, the victim has to push up on his feet, causing severe pain in his feet and legs. As the body suffers continual unbearable pain, it becomes increasingly difficult to breathe. It is during these moments of intense suffering that Jesus uses the little breath He has to respond to others in love. To those who insulted Him and mistreated Him he says, "Father, forgive them..." (Luke 23:34)



The thief on the cross. One of the thieves on the cross is changed by seeing Jesus' loving responses amidst agonizing pain. (Luke 23:39-43)

The temple curtain. The moment Jesus dies, the temple curtain in front of the holy of holies is ripped open by God. There is no longer a physical barrier to God. For the first time since sin entered the world, direct access to God's presence is possible for everyone through the sacrifice of Jesus. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The empty tomb. Jesus rises from the dead, defeating the power of Satan, sin and death. He gives us hope for the future. (Matthew 28:1-7; Hebrews 2:14-15)



Reflection Questions

1. How will you respond to this extravagant love and sacrifice for you?



Application Activity

Have a funeral, bonfire or candle service. Have an extended time for participants to be quiet before God. Have them respond to God's stirrings - repentance for sin, a commitment to following God fully, or thanks to Jesus for His loving sacrifice. Have them record their response to God. When they are ready to commit to what they have written, have them burn or bury their paper. (If appropriate, have participants share what has been written to a team member or close friend. Pray over them. James 5:16)



Further Study (Optional)

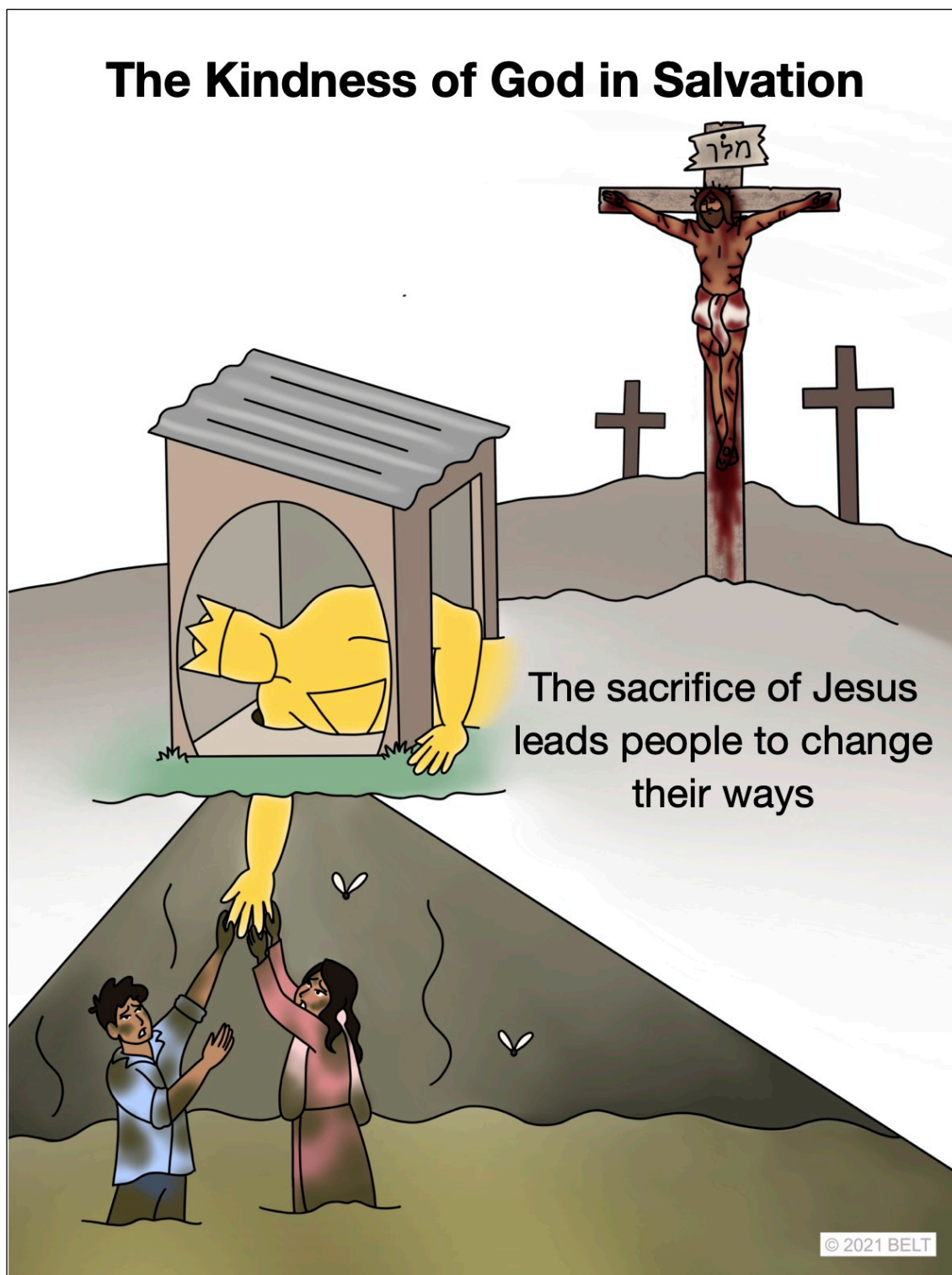
1. **Defining forgiveness.** Forgiveness is to release someone from the punishment for a wrongdoing or an injury. When God forgives, He chooses not to bring it up again. (Jeremiah 31:34; Psalm 103:8-14; Micah 7:18-19)
2. **The scapegoat – a picture of forgiveness.** As part of the annual Day of Atonement in Israel, two goats are presented before the Lord. The first goat is killed as a sin offering to the Lord – a humbling reminder to Israel that an innocent life was taken for their sin. The high priest then takes the second goat, lays his hands on the goat's head and confesses over it Israel's sins. The goat is then released, "bearing" the sins of Israel into the desert, never to

be seen again. This is a vivid picture of God's forgiveness for sin – God is releasing them from the punishment of their sins and choosing to not remember their sins any more. (Leviticus 16:7-10, 20-22; Isaiah 53:5-6, 11-12; 1 Peter 2:24)



Poster Description

In the greatest display of kindness and mercy, God came to rescue us from the filthiness and bondage of our sin and rebellion. Jesus willingly suffered a horrible death on the cross so that we may have our sins forgiven and be restored to fellowship with God. This sacrificial love and kindness of God strongly influences people to change their sinful ways.



Salvation from Sin

Summary: The good news of salvation from sin is the main message of Jesus and His disciples. The wonderful invitation to be reconciled to God is given to all. However, only those who humble themselves, turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus are accepted into God's family. The result of having our sins and our past forgiven results in great joy and freedom. As the Holy Spirit comes to live within us, He helps us be victorious as we seek to become more like Jesus, our new priority and greatest love.

A. THE GREAT JOY OF SALVATION

The Ethiopian Official. Acts 8:26-31, 35-39

1. How did Philip's message impact the Ethiopian official?

The official's eager obedience. As Philip explains the prophecies about Jesus to this African Gentile, the powerful official understands and believes in Jesus. The official's desire to be baptized shows his willingness to follow Jesus. Afterwards, he continues his journey with great joy (a sign of an-internal change).

God's Priceless Kingdom. Matthew 13:44-46

1. What do we learn about the value of God's kingdom?

*"When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it."
Matthew 13:46*

The men's willing sacrifice. Recognizing the priceless value of the treasure and pearl, the men willingly and joyfully sell everything they have to obtain them. Likewise, the valuable gift of God's kingdom is available to all who recognize its worth and are willing to surrender everything to obtain it.

B. SALVATION'S POWERFUL IMPACT

Paul's Salvation Experience. Acts 26:9-21

1. What is the result of Paul's encounter with Jesus? Acts 26:9-23

From persecutor to persecuted. Paul is completely transformed as he meets and understands that Jesus is the promised Messiah miraculously raised from the dead. Instead of silencing Christians, he now begins zealously preaching their message throughout the Roman Empire. Despite persecution and sufferings, he testifies about his encounter with Jesus and the salvation message.

Salvation brings transformation. (Optional) The powerful effect of salvation on the sinner is described as: being born again (John 3:3); becoming a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); receiving a new heart (Ezekiel 11:19-20); passing from death to life (John 5:24); turning from darkness to light (Acts 26:18); being lost but now found (Luke 15:32).

C. RECEIVING THE GREATEST GIFT

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Luke 18:9-14 **

1. What is the “righteous” Pharisee like?
2. Why is the tax collector accepted by God?

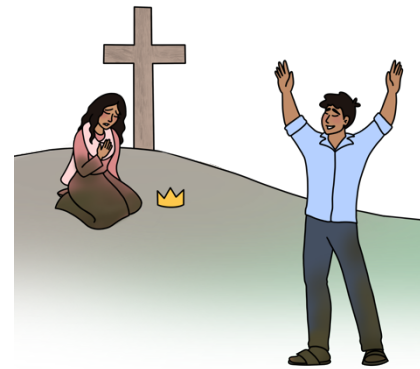
Being accepted by God. The “righteous” Pharisee is proud, unchanged and unaccepted by God. The tax collector is saved because he humbles himself, recognizes his sin, and has faith to ask God for mercy and forgiveness.

The Good News of Salvation.

1. Discuss what is included in the message of salvation? Acts 20:20-21; James 4:8-10; Galatians 2:20

Receiving God’s forgiveness. Salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned by good actions (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet God cannot wisely forgive a sinner who does not have a genuine willingness to turn from sin and instead live for God (2 Corinthians 5:15). The salvation message includes:

- *Repentance from sin.* Sinners must humble themselves, being sorry for their selfishness and disobedience to God. They must confess their sin and be willing to turn from it. Joel 2:12-13; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9
- *Faith in Jesus.* Sinners can trust that God is merciful and will forgive their sins because of Jesus’ sacrificial act of love on the cross. They must be willing to make Jesus Lord by committing to live under His rulership and His law of love. John 3:16-17; Matthew 7:21 (Romans 6:11-12, 17-18, 22-23)



Restored friendship with God. God responds to repentance and faith by forgiving sin and purifying our hearts. We are freed from the power of sin and death and are made spiritually alive because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. He welcomes us into His family with great joy (Luke 15:10). He gives us the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to renew us, and to confirm within us that we have become His children. Colossians 1:13-14; Romans 8:15-16 (Matthew 3:11; Titus 3:5-7)



D. WALKING WITH JESUS IN VICTORY

Becoming like Jesus.

1. How can we imitate Jesus? 1 John 2:6; John 15:4-5; Romans 8:13-14
2. In what ways do you see God transforming you? What areas do you still need the Holy Spirit’s help and victory?

Living in victory. Adopted into God’s family, we now have the privilege of walking closely with Jesus. As we grow in the Word and love of God, we begin to increasingly reflect His good and holy

character (Ephesians 5:1-2, 8-10). The Holy Spirit living in us strengthens us to live upright and holy lives (Galatians 5:22-25). Though some bad habits may take time to change, we can experience victory over sin with God's help. (See the Further Study section on overcoming sinful habits.)



Reflection Questions

1. Have you experienced the great joy and transformation that salvation brings? God offers to you life's greatest treasure.
2. Does your life reflect that Jesus is the highest priority - over your time, money, dreams for your life, even your family?



Application Activity

Share your salvation testimony. Sharing our personal testimony is a powerful way to share the good news about God with others. (People can argue against our beliefs but not our personal experience.) Briefly tell your own salvation experience with someone, sharing the various aspects of salvation learned in this lesson.



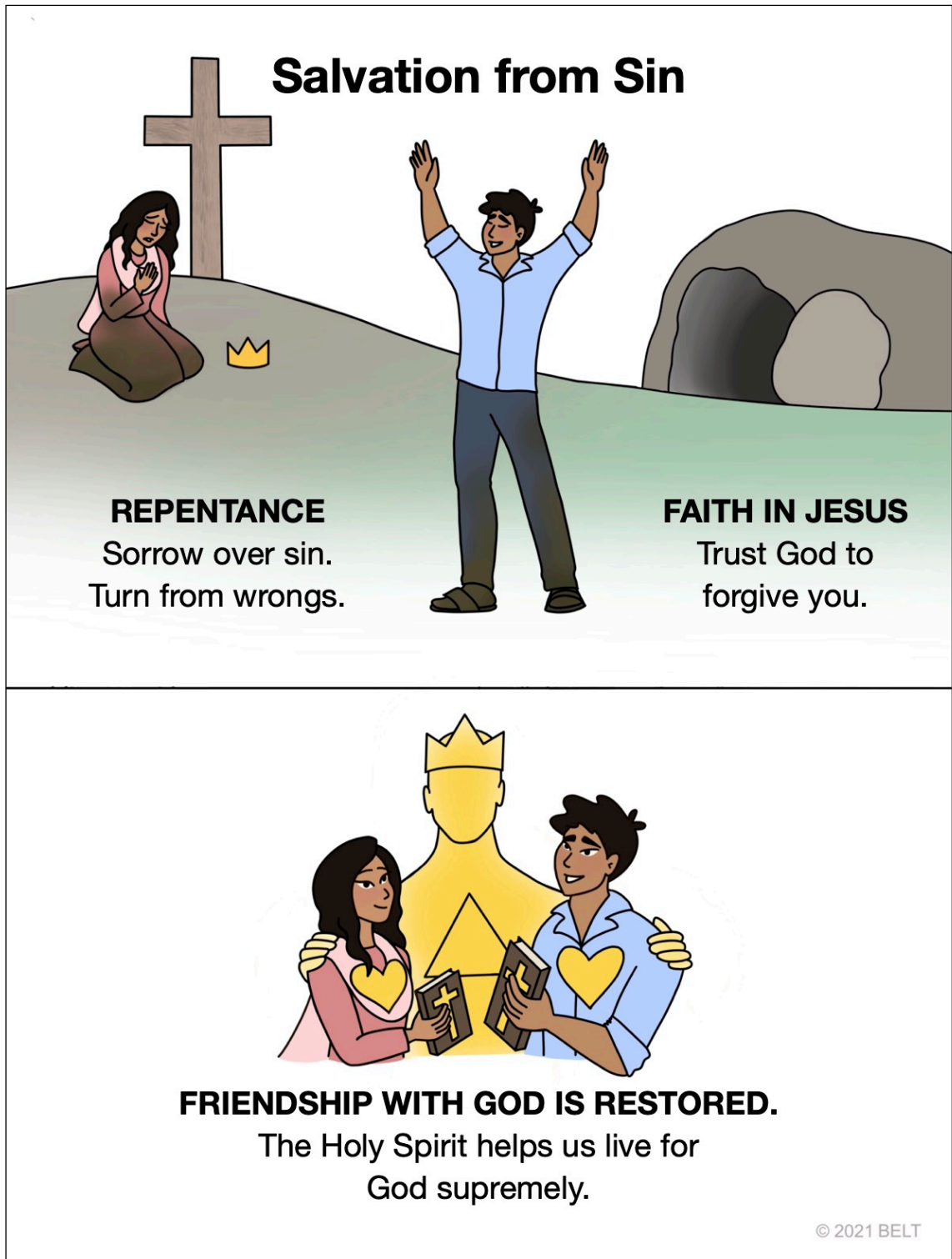
Further Study (Optional)

1. **Living in the Kingdom of God.** The Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven and Light) is not a political or physical kingdom. It is multiplying here on earth, and exists fully in heaven (John 18:33-37). The Kingdom of God exists wherever Jesus is honored as king and all live by truth and according to God's law of love. We are to pray for the kingdom to come on earth not just in our personal lives, but in every area of society (Matthew 6:10).
2. **How to overcome sinful habits.**
 - *Stay close to God.* Pursuing a close friendship with Jesus is the primary way to achieve victory over sin. Keep your heart tender towards God so even a hint of wrong brings immediate conviction. Don't neglect your daily time with God. John 15:4-5; 1 John 5:4; Proverbs 16:6
 - *Be strengthened by the Spirit.* Respond to the gentle conviction of the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to strengthen your choices to do what is right. John 14:26; Romans 8:13
 - *Flee temptation immediately.* The longer you delay, the stronger the temptation. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Genesis 39:6-11
 - *Cut off sources of temptation.* Set up boundaries to avoid places, people, times and things that tempt you. Matthew 5:27-30
 - *Keep close accountability.* Keep regular honest accountability with other believers. James 5:16
 - *Practice the spiritual disciplines.* Practice fasting with prayer, Bible memorization and worship. These strengthen your self-control and focus your mind on what is good. Matthew 4:1-11; Psalm 119:11; Romans 12:1-2



Poster Description

God has made a way to restore our broken relationship with Him. As we humble ourselves and repent of living for ourselves, and put our faith in Jesus, He promises to forgive our sins. He restores our broken friendship, and gives us a new start. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we can have the power to live for God in His kingdom of light and according to truth and love.





Poster Description

God loves all people in all nations and desires that they join His big, diverse family (God's arms around world map). God uses His people (yellow heart) to spread His kingdom of light on the earth. We have the great privilege of sharing about our friendship with God and teaching His Word to those still living in ignorance and darkness (blindfold, black heart). We go with the presence, authority and power of the Holy Spirit.

Note: This poster is optional. It can be used with a short inspirational message on missions before or after the local outreach.

The Command of Missions



“Go and make disciples of all nations...”

Matthew 28:19-20

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