



*"Blessed is the one
who delights in the
law of the Lord. He is
like a tree planted by
streams of water,
which yields its fruit
in season and whose
leaf does not wither."*

Psalms 1:1-3

TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

Growing in character & leadership



VERSION 4.1
YWAM BELT

THE TRANSFORMATION SERIES

Transformation of Character TS Level 2 v4.0

LIST OF TOPICS

1. Abraham – Walking by Faith
2. Joseph – Practicing Forgiveness
3. Moses – Growing in Humility
4. Joshua – Hearing and Courageously Obeying God
5. Deborah – Supporting Women in Ministry
6. David – Pursuing God with a Pure Heart
7. Daniel – Working with Excellence
8. Jesus – Leading as a Servant
9. Peter – Building Christian Unity
10. Paul – Spreading God’s Kingdom of Light

NEW IN THE TS2 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:

- *Historical background* – presents the historical setting and some key events of the Biblical period in which the leader lived.
- *Life lesson* – offers practical application of the topic to life and ministry.
- *Outreach Story Set* – the story from each lesson most suitable for Bible Storytelling in the seminar and on outreach is indicated by a double asterisk (**).
- *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.

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 influenced by YWAM's foundational teaching, as well as teaching from the SOTB (School of the Bible), BSN (Bible School for the Nations), 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 Michael Schlender for his contributions in helping to shape the first draft teachings of the TS2, as well as editorial insights; to Dow Saunders for his apt insights in the review process; and to Evynn Schlender who continues to amaze us with her artistic illustrations.

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

God's Story of Restoration

Introduction

From Eden to Revelation, the Bible is a remarkable account of God's power and love at work to make a spoiled and broken world beautiful again. Faith and hope are stirred as we see God masterfully direct His plan of restoration on the earth. He elevates and preserves the righteous. He raises up and brings down leaders and nations. He accomplishes His goals by partnering with His people, despite their imperfections and failures, to see the seeds of His kingdom of light grow against all odds and in the darkest of places.

A. HOW GOD BRINGS RESTORATION

The message of the seeds. Mark 4:26-32

1. As you look at your community and nation, where do you see God at work to bring restoration? What things is God still needing to rebuild?
2. What do these two stories about planting seeds reveal about how God's kingdom grows? How does this bring hope?

The spread of God's kingdom of light. In the first story, the farmer is the one who plants the seed, but God makes it grow. In the second story of the mustard seed, the tiny seed is planted and surprisingly grows into a large tree. These stories reveal how God's kingdom of light grows. Just like the seeds that are planted, God's kingdom begins small and may seem insignificant, but God brings growth (1 Corinthians 3:7). He will bring blessing to many (even when we are unaware that He is at work.) When we see the sin, injustice and broken lives around us, let's not forget the message of the seeds. Let's remember how God has worked in history. He invites us to partner with Him in bringing positive change in our own communities and nations today.

B. GOD DELIGHTS IN USING ORDINARY PEOPLE

God partners with His people

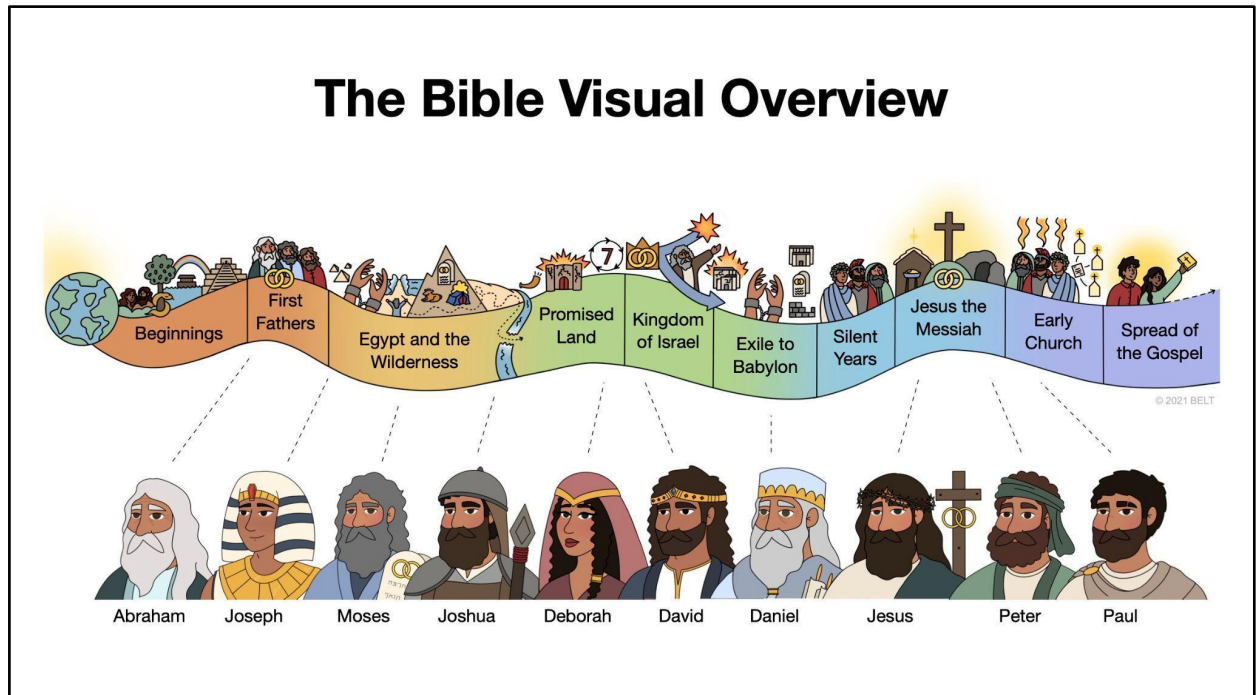
To accomplish His remarkable plan to repair and rebuild this broken world, God uses unlikely people with very different stories. **Abraham**, an old, dishonest nomad. **Joseph**, a slave and prisoner. **Moses**, an exiled murderer. **Joshua**, a spy. **Deborah**, a female judge which was unheard of at that time. **David**, a lowly shepherd. **Daniel**, a captive living in exile. **Peter**, a poorly educated fisherman from a despised region. **Paul**, a persecutor of believers. God calls these ordinary people, develops them, empowers them and then partners with them in extraordinary ways. And He wants to do the same with you.

God builds within us the character needed to impact the world

God is committed to the process of rebuilding our lives. At salvation, God changes our hearts, but our patterns of thinking, behavior and habits must also be transformed (Romans 12:1-2). Godly character is formed by discovering and applying truth to every area of our lives. The Holy Spirit is available to us in this process of transformation. God also uses His written Word, His people, and experiences (good and bad) to reshape us to be more like Him (Philippians 2:12-13).

C. EXPLORING GOD'S STORY OF RESTORATION

The **Bible Visual Overview** shows God's story in the Bible with its main periods, events and people. It is used along with the **Bible Action Overview** (learned throughout the seminar) to provide the historical framework to understand the lives of ten Biblical leaders. It also gives us a clearer picture of how God is working out His plan of restoration on the earth. Exploring the lives of these leaders not only reveals principles that can transform our own character and leadership, but should inspire us to participate with God in His continuing story of restoration in our own generation.



Abraham

Walking by Faith

Summary

Despite his failures and his background, Abraham learns to trust and obey God. His faith grows as he experiences the faithfulness of God. Called a friend of God, Abraham demonstrates his great love for God by being willing to give up what is most precious to follow Him.



Historical Background

Abraham lives in the capital city of Ur in the land of the Chaldees (the ancient kingdom of Sumer). His ancestors and father, Terah, worshipped other gods, along with the people of Ur (Joshua 24:2). Around 2000 B.C., God calls Abraham to leave his country and settle in the land of Canaan. It is a strategic location at the cross-roads of trade routes between the major civilizations of the ancient world.

A. GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

The Call of Abraham. Genesis 12:1-9

1. In what ways does Abraham show that he has faith in God?
2. What does building an altar to Yahweh at Shechem reveal about Abraham's faith?
3. What are the three things God promises in His covenant with Abraham?

Abraham walks by faith. God reveals Himself to Abraham in the darkest of places. God calls him out from among his idolatrous culture. Abraham begins a journey to an unknown destination (Hebrews 11:8), leading his entire household (including many servants and flocks) far from the safety and comfort of relatives. Abraham trusts in God to direct and protect him in a foreign and hostile land. At the age of 75, he arrives in Canaan, the land God said He would give his descendants. He builds an altar to God at his first camp site, as an act of commitment to following and worshiping the one true God.



God's covenant. God promises to bless Abraham by making him into a great nation. God will also give him and his descendants the land of Canaan. God plants them in a strategic location so that they can be a godly influence and blessing to all people groups and nations of the world.



Life Lesson. God calls us to a walk of faith. Sometimes He asks things of us despite the challenges of age and the unknowns. Sometimes He may ask us to give up what's become comfortable. But He promises to be with us and is faithful to fulfill His promises.

God Promises Abraham a Son. Genesis 15:1-7

God's original covenant creates an expectation in Abraham of a bright future. However, as time passes, he still doesn't have children or any land (he is a foreigner in the land of Canaan). Abraham becomes discouraged. God again confirms his promise to Abraham that he would have many descendants, like the vast number of stars. Abraham believes what God says. Abraham is called a friend of God because of his faith (James 2:23).

B. ABRAHAM'S FAILURES OF FAITH

Sarah and Hagar. Genesis 16:1-16

1. Why is Abraham and Sarah's decision to have a child through Hagar a compromise of their faith in God? What are the results of this decision?
2. Discuss ways that Christians in your community are tempted to compromise their faith because of fear, unbelief or pressures to follow cultural practices. What are the results of such compromises?

Abraham does not wait for God's timing. After 10 years of waiting for God to fulfill His promise of a son, Sarah is still barren. Instead of waiting for God's timing, Abraham and Sarah decide to have a child the culturally acceptable way - through Sarah's servant, Hagar. But this is not God's plan. Abraham and Sarah's unbelief and poor decision causes jealousy and ongoing conflict (which still exists today between the Jews and the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael.) Yet God continues to work with Abraham to build him into a man of great faith.



Life Lesson. Waiting for God to fulfill His promises in our lives requires both faith and patience. Rushing to make things happen our way can have negative results. But God is committed to restore us, and to continue His work in us in order to fulfill His plan for us.

Abraham doubts God with Abimelech. Genesis 20:1-18 (Optional)

Shortly before meeting Abimelech, we find Abraham doubting God's promise again after 24 years of waiting (Genesis 17:1-8, 15-21). God promises that within one year's time, Sarah will finally give birth to their long-awaited son. Despite this promise, Abraham lies about being married to beautiful Sarah who is then taken by Abimelech, a Canaanite king. (Abraham does not learn from a similar situation with Pharaoh in Genesis 12:10-20). God intervenes and rescues Sarah in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham.

C. ABRAHAM'S GREATEST TEST OF FAITH

Sarah gives birth to Isaac. Genesis 21:1-8

There is a great celebration when Sarah finally bears a son. God fulfills His word 25 years after He first spoke His covenant to Abraham. Abraham is 100 years old; Sarah is 90.

*Abraham offers Isaac. Genesis 22:1-19 ***

1. In what ways does Abraham show his complete trust in God?
2. Why is God testing Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, Isaac?

The painful journey. For many years, Abraham has experienced that God is trustworthy and, as a result, his faith has grown. He is able to obey God's unthinkable instruction, sacrificing his only son through whom God's promise was to be fulfilled. When Abraham sees the location in the distance, he tells his servants that he will return with Isaac. He later tells Isaac that God will provide the lamb for the sacrifice. (Hebrews 11:17-19 comments that Abraham believed that God could raise his son from the dead.) In the greatest act of obedience and faith, Abraham raises a knife to sacrifice his

beloved son. God stops Abraham when he sees that Abraham loves Him above all else. God honors Abraham's devotion and faith, provides a ram, and reaffirms His covenant.

An invitation to identify with God. In offering up his one and only beloved son, Abraham has the opportunity to identify with God's anguish in offering up His one and only beloved son some 2000 years later in that same location. God provides a lamb for Abraham and also for us - Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).



Life Lesson. God uses challenges and tests to reveal our heart motives and to build godly character in us. (A test is an opportunity to grow in our faith. A temptation is an invitation to sin.) As we prove to be faithful, God can trust us and use us in greater ways to bring blessing.

Abraham, the father of faith

Abraham is an example of walking by faith and loving God supremely. His faith, which results in obedience, pleases God (James 2:21-24). God trusts him to be the father of the nation of Israel and a model for all believers.



Reflection Questions

1. How strong is your walk of faith? Is there anything God is asking you to do, but because of unbelief you are not doing it?
2. Have you had failures of faith that still trouble you? Take some time for God to forgive and restore you.
3. Is there anything God has promised for your personal life or ministry that has not yet been fulfilled? Remind yourself of God's faithfulness.



Application Activity

Build a stone altar to God. Take some time alone, and ask God to point out if there is anything in your life that has become more important than Him (it can even be a good thing). If need be, repent and ask God to take the highest place in your life that He wants and deserves. Find a smooth rock or large stone and, with a marker, write on it what God has shown you. Along with other participants, use your stone to build an altar to God as a symbol of your devotion to Him alone.



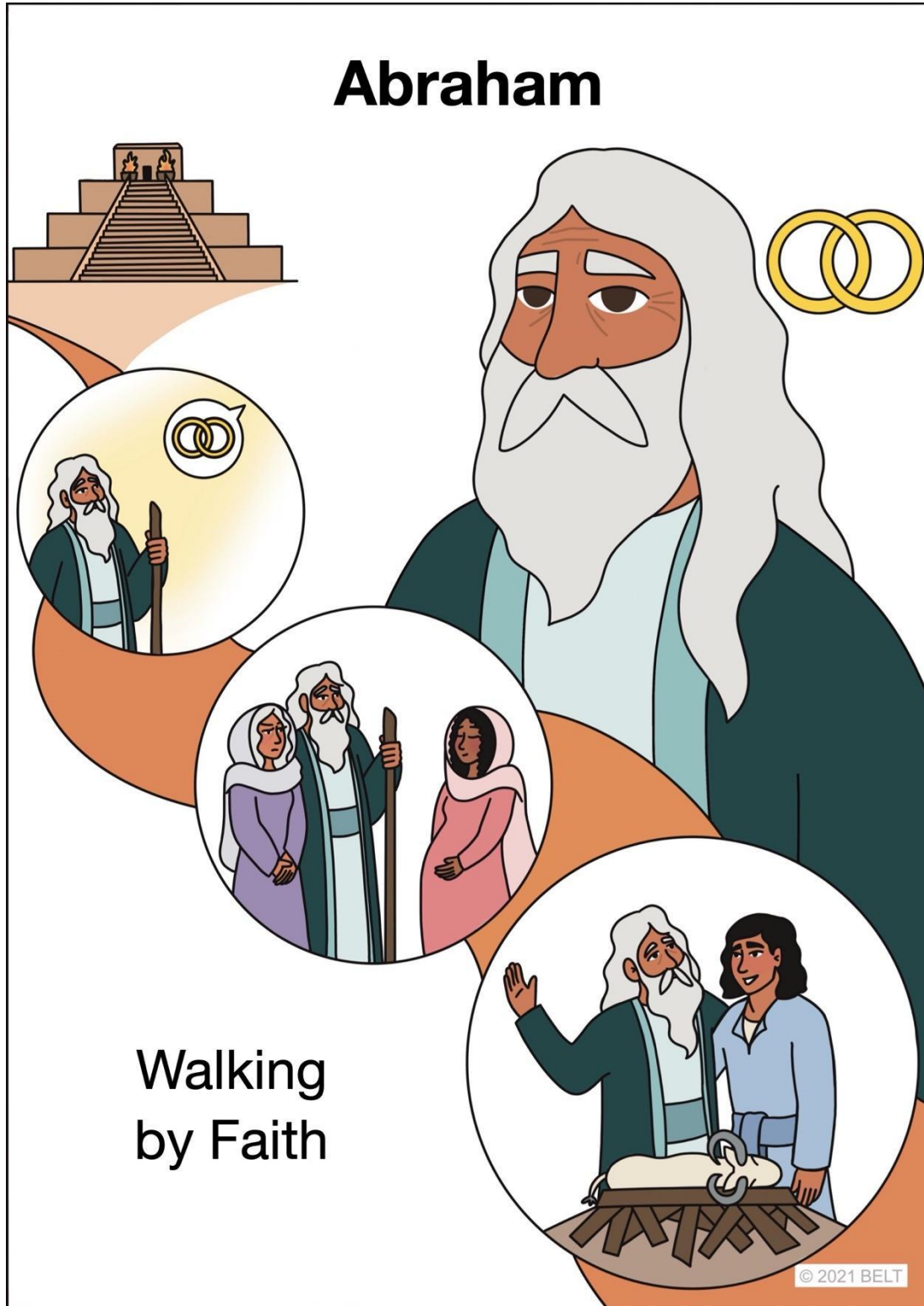
Further Study (Optional)

- *Blessing through Abraham's descendants.* God gives Abraham a glimpse of His plan of restoration for the world. Through Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of Abraham, God would fulfill His promise (Galatians 3:16). Then through all who believe in the Gospel, beginning with the Jews, God would bless all nations (Galatians 3:8-9; Acts 3:25-26; Romans 4:16-25).
- *Mount Moriah.* Two thousand years after Abraham, Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, was crucified at Golgotha, a hill just outside Jerusalem (John 19:17-18). Some scholars believe it was the ancient site of Moriah where Isaac was offered (Genesis 22:2). Also, Moriah became the location of the Jewish temple, where sacrifices for sin were made (2 Chronicles 3:1). In this sacred place, God would provide the Lamb for the final sacrifice for sin.



Poster Description

God makes a covenant with Abraham (joined rings) and calls him to leave his home in idolatrous Ur (background of a pagan temple). He journeys by faith to an unknown land (left circle). Abraham and Sarah cannot have children and doubt God's promise of a son, so they have a child through Hagar (middle circle). When God sees Abraham loves Him supremely and is willing to offer up his son, God provides a ram for the offering (right circle).



JOSEPH

Practicing Forgiveness

Summary

Despite experiencing repeated betrayals, difficulties, and suffering, Joseph remains faithful to God. God uses each unjust situation Joseph is thrown into to develop his character and his skills. Instead of growing in bitterness, Joseph chooses to grow in forgiveness and trust. God honors his faithfulness and promotes him to a high position in leadership, and uses him to preserve his family and the world during a severe global famine.



Historical Background

Abraham's son, Isaac, has a son named Jacob. Jacob (renamed Israel) has 12 sons who become the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel. They are all shepherds who live in the land of Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants. Jacob's first four sons are Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, all born to Jacob's first wife Leah. Jacob's youngest two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, are the only sons born to his favorite wife, Rachel, who dies giving birth to Benjamin.

A. JOSEPH SOLD INTO SLAVERY

*Joseph is betrayed by his brothers. Genesis 37:1-36 ***

1. Why do Joseph's brothers hate him?
2. In what ways is the cruelty of the brothers shown?

Jacob's older sons plot against Joseph. Joseph is Jacob's favorite of his 12 sons. He is the oldest son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, born in his old age. Jacob makes Joseph a special coat which makes Jacob's older sons jealous and angry. In addition to this, Joseph unwisely tells his brothers his dreams (where they bow before him) which makes them hate him even more. As a result, they cruelly sell their brother into a life of slavery and suffering. Through it all, God is working out His plans for Joseph's life as He works on Joseph's character.



Life Lesson. Sometimes unjust, hurtful and even evil things happen to us through no choice of our own. We can be sure God has not abandoned us (Isaiah 49:14-16). He hates injustice and will accomplish His plans for our lives, though we may not see it now.

B. JOSEPH'S SUCCESS IN EGYPT

Joseph in Potiphar's house. Genesis 39:1-23

1. How do we see God preparing Joseph for what is ahead?
2. How does Joseph respond to an unjust accusation and wrongful treatment?

Joseph grows in his abilities. God continues to work out His plan for Joseph even as he becomes a slave in the household of Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's most trusted officials. Potiphar eventually makes Joseph manager of all of his property because he sees God's favor on Joseph's life, his leadership skills, and his loyal character. Later, while in prison for two years, God's favor is again on Joseph and he is made the manager of the prison.



Joseph grows in faithful character. Even though Joseph is separated from his family and culture and forced into work he does not choose, he remains faithful to God. When seduced repeatedly by Potiphar's wife, he remains loyal to Potiphar and to God, knowing this powerful woman could cause great trouble for him. When Joseph is unjustly accused and thrown into prison, he doesn't become bitter. God is with him and makes him succeed in everything he does.



Life Lesson: When experiencing unjust treatment, we need to guard our hearts against bitterness and resentment, a poison that will destroy us (Ephesians 4:31-32). Instead, remain steadfast in our character. Trust God is working on our behalf and preparing us for what lies ahead. (Psalm 27:13-14)

Joseph is promoted by Pharaoh. Genesis 41:1-57

Joseph uses his God-given gifts of leadership and interpreting dreams to recommend a plan of action to preserve Egypt from the drought that is to come. Pharaoh recognizes Joseph's wisdom and the favor of God on his life and promotes him to the position of second in command over Egypt at 30 years of age. After 13 years of challenges and growth (Genesis 37:2), Joseph is prepared for this critical moment.

C. JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS IN EGYPT

Joseph's dream fulfilled. Genesis 42:1-20

When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt and bow before him, Joseph realizes his dream from 22 years earlier is fulfilled. (It is the second year of the 7 years of famine.) Joseph also remembers the jealousy and cruelty of his brothers. So Joseph comes up with a plan to test his brothers to see if they have changed.

The repentant brothers. (Genesis 42:21-24; Genesis 44:1-34) Optional Joseph is able to hear the healing words of his brothers admitting their guilt and regret over their treatment of him and the anguish they caused their father. Judah (who originally had the idea to sell Joseph into slavery) now willingly offers to become a slave to save his father's next favored son, Benjamin. While God was at work in Joseph and his circumstances, He was also at work in the brothers' hearts.



Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. Genesis 45:1-18, 24-28

1. How do Joseph's brothers react when Joseph first reveals himself to them?
2. How have you seen God work in your life to bring good through injustices?

Joseph's forgiveness. Joseph is deeply moved when he sees that his brothers have changed. He cannot contain the powerful emotions that overcome him. When he reveals who he is, the brothers are terrified, remembering their cruel treatment of him. They know Joseph has the power to do whatever he wants to them. Joseph, instead of taking revenge, extends mercy. He reassures his

brothers of his complete forgiveness and good will toward them. He acknowledges the hand of God working in the circumstances of his life in order to save his family. (A similar event is repeated after Jacob dies. Genesis 50:15-21)



Life Lesson: Responding with forgiveness and kindness, rather than revenge, to those who mistreat us frees us emotionally, mentally, and physically (Romans 12:17-21). Know that God is in the process of working everything out for good that was meant for evil (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

Jacob and his family move to Egypt. Genesis 46:1-7; 26-34

The conclusion of Genesis reveals the beautiful story of a God working out good from great cruelty and injustice. We see Joseph reunited with his whole family. He moves all 70 family members to the fertile region of Goshen in Egypt where they enjoy Pharaoh's favor and protection. They are saved from starvation and are able to grow into the great nation God had promised to Abraham.



Reflection Questions

1. Favoritism can cause hurt, jealousy, and division. With God there are no favorites (Romans 2:11). Are you treating everyone equally - family members, work mates, church family, etc?
2. How have you responded to unkind and unjust treatment? Are you holding on to any anger, unforgiveness or bitterness in your heart towards others?
3. In what ways has unforgiveness affected your life (emotionally, mentally or physically)?



Application Activity

Releasing unforgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift that allows us to love in the midst of real pain and evil. There is no other way to heal from injustice than to forgive. Ask God to bring to mind if there is someone you need to forgive (friends, parents, spouses, leaders, etc.) Write a letter to the person (not to be sent) expressing how you were wronged, the pain you may still be experiencing, and what you wish they would have done instead. End the letter with "I forgive you". When you are ready to let go of the unforgiveness, destroy the letter. As an act of releasing the situation into God's hands, consider doing one of the following: throw flower seeds or blow bubbles into the wind; float a flower down a river. Feel free to seek prayer with a team member or others at any time. Also consider the Further Study section.



Further Study (Optional)

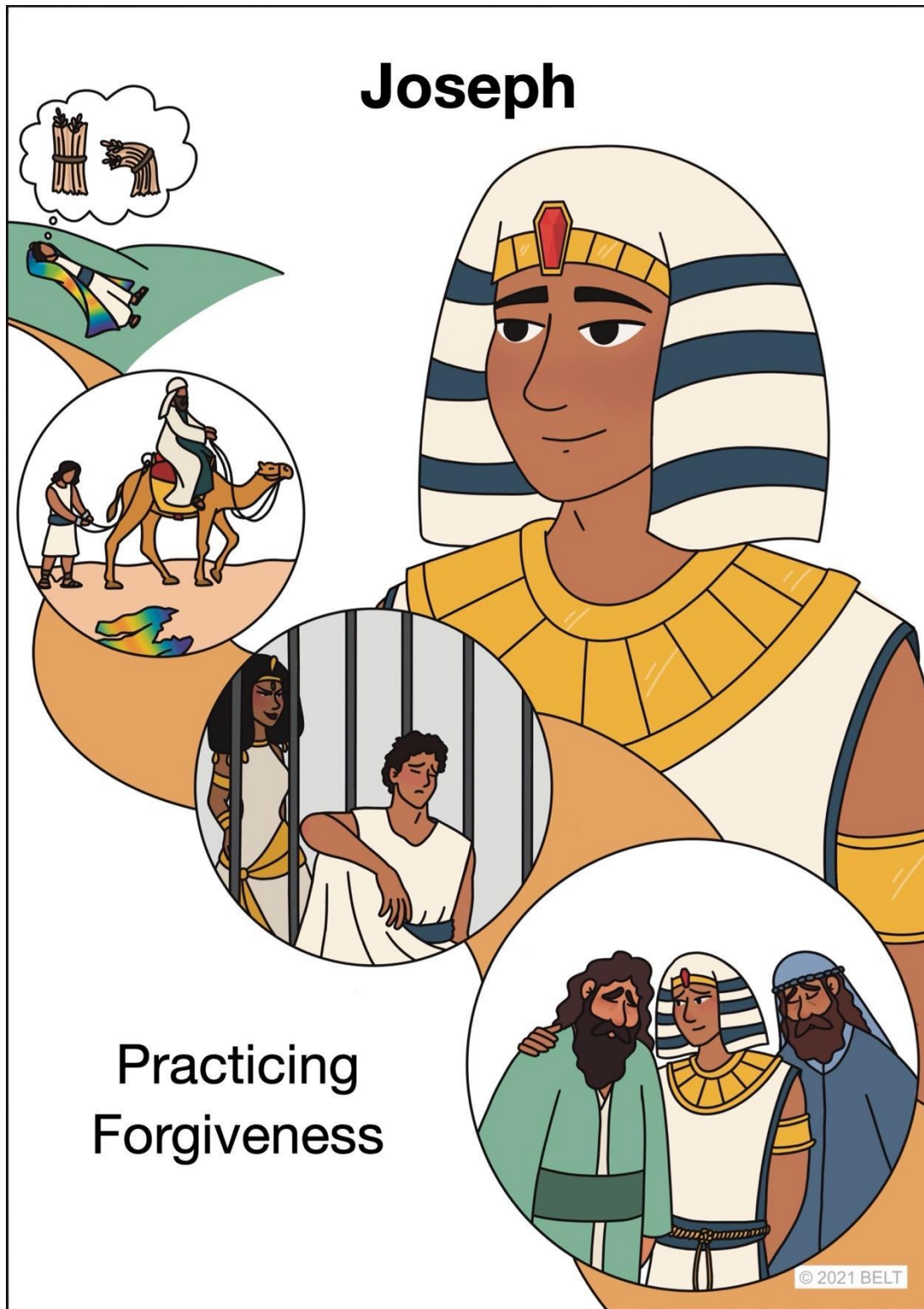
Principles of forgiveness

- *Deal with unresolved anger.* Anger is a natural response to mistreatment or injustice. But unresolved anger can negatively affect us and others. Ask God to give you a tender heart so you can forgive just as He has forgiven you. Mark 11:25-26; Colossians 3:13
- *Respond with blessing.* If thoughts of the injustice and pain return, repeatedly forgive and bless the person. Continue to choose freedom through forgiveness. 1 Peter 3:8-9; Matthew 18:21-22; Romans 12:21
- *Seek reconciliation.* If wise and safe, seek reconciliation and peace with the offender. Express forgiveness to them for the wrong you suffered. Matthew 5:23-24



Poster Description

Joseph is promoted by Pharaoh from being a slave managing the jail to being a ruler in Egypt. Many years before, after Joseph shares his dream (background) with his brothers, he is cruelly betrayed by them and sold as a slave (left circle). In Egypt, Joseph remains faithful to God and to Potiphar despite unjust treatment (middle circle). Joseph forgives his brothers for their cruelty towards him (right circle). He sees how God has brought good from very difficult situations.



MOSES

Growing in Humility

Summary

As a prince of Egypt, Moses learns valuable skills needed for leadership. As a lowly shepherd, Moses learns humility, one of the most important character qualities needed in a leader. Because of Moses' preparation, God uses him as a great leader and deliverer of Israel. Moses seeks God and trusts Him in the most challenging of situations, and directs others to follow God's leadership.



Historical Background

As Jacob and his family move from Canaan to Egypt, God confirms that this is the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. God had told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years, but that God would multiply them into a great nation and eventually bring them back to the land of Canaan (Genesis 15:13-16). Because the Egyptians despise shepherds (Genesis 46:34), God is able to multiply the Israelites and preserve their religion and culture in the fertile region of Goshen with little interference or intermarriage with the Egyptians. By the time Israel leaves Egypt, exactly 430 years after they arrived, the Israelites number approximately 2 million people (Exodus 12:37-41). During their stay in Egypt, a new Egyptian Pharaoh emerges (a new dynasty). Threatened by the number and strength of the Israelites, he forces them to work as slaves. But God has not forgotten His people nor His promise to Abraham.

A. MOSES' PREPARATION FOR LEADERSHIP

Israel suffers in Egypt

Pharaoh wants to ensure the growing number of Israelites will not rise up against Egypt. In fear, he enslaves them and commands all newborn baby boys to be drowned in the Nile. Exodus 1:8-22

Moses' early life. Exodus 2:1-15

1. What do we learn about Moses' early life in Egypt? How do we see God protecting and preparing him?
2. Why does Moses kill the Egyptian and then flee?

Moses is raised in Pharaoh's house. God's protection, care, and preparation can be seen in Moses' early life through the provision of Pharaoh's daughter. Instead of killing him as her father had decreed, she raises him as her own son. Moses receives the highest level of education and becomes powerful in speech and accomplishments (Acts 7:22).

Moses sees himself as Israel's deliverer. At the age of 40, Moses kills an Egyptian for mistreating an Israelite slave. He thinks that his own people will see that God is using him to rescue them (Acts 7:23-25). When the Israelites reject him as their deliverer and then Pharaoh tries to kill him, Moses flees from Egypt. He becomes a lowly shepherd in a foreign land (Midian). But God is not done with Moses. During these lonely and challenging years, God is humbling and preparing Moses to be one of the meekest leaders on earth (Numbers 12:3).

*Moses and the burning bush. Exodus 3:1-14; 4:1-17 ***

1. What are Moses' concerns when God calls him to lead his people out of Egypt? What is God teaching Moses through His answers?
2. Compare how Moses sees himself before fleeing Egypt to the way he sees himself at the burning bush. How does God see him? Exodus 3:11; 4:10-15
3. Ask God to reveal to you how He sees you. Do you think too little of yourself, that God can't use you? Do you think too highly of yourself, forgetting God and doing things your own way?

Moses can trust God. From a burning bush, God reveals to Moses His compassion for His suffering people, and calls Moses to lead Israel out of slavery. Moses has concerns that the Israelites will again not follow his leadership. God reminds Moses that He is the same miraculous, promise-fulfilling God of his forefathers. He is working out His plan of restoration which Moses (and Israel) are a key part of (Exodus 3:14-16). God then shows Moses miraculous signs. Moses, focusing on his own limitations, still responds in fear and unbelief, and pleads with God to send someone else (Exodus 4:10-13).



God teaches Moses true humility. After 40 years working as a lowly shepherd, Moses thinks too little of himself (false humility). He doesn't believe God can use him. However, God promises to be with him and give him the words to say (Exodus 4:11-12). When first in Egypt, Moses (in his arrogance) wanted to deliver Israel his own way. But God is wanting to use Moses to deliver Israel in a way that demonstrates to Egypt and the surrounding nations His great power and that He is the Most High God (Exodus 9:13-17).



Life Lesson: As we get to know God, our fears and the opinions of others become less important. The more we see ourselves the way God does, not more and not less (true humility), the more effectively God can partner with us in His unique calling for our lives. (Isaiah 66:2b, 1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

B. MOSES LEADS ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT

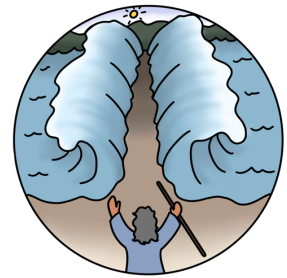
God delivers Israel from slavery

Despite his doubts, Moses obeys God and returns to Egypt. He is now 80 years old (Exodus 7:7). God commands through Moses, "Let my people go." Pharaoh says, "No." So God sends ten devastating plagues on Egypt, each a direct judgment against an Egyptian god (Exodus 12:12). The tenth plague is the death of all the first-born sons in Egypt, including Pharaoh's own son (who is considered a son of Egypt's chief god). Pharaoh finally lets Israel go. God leads them through the wilderness to the Red Sea.

The crossing of the Red Sea. Exodus 14:1-31

1. Compare the response of Moses to the response of the Israelites when Pharaoh's army suddenly arrives at the Red Sea.
2. How does Moses respond to the false accusations of the people about his leadership?
3. What effect does this miraculous deliverance have on the people?

Moses encourages Israel to trust in God. Pharaoh changes his mind and pursues Israel with his whole army. The people accuse Moses of leading them to their death. Moses encourages the people to look to God for their deliverance. Moses then obeys God's command and leads the Israelites through the sea to safety. Moses learns to trust God (compare with the burning bush). As a result of his courageous leadership, Israel is also learning to trust God and Moses' leadership. (See the Israelites' song in Exodus 15:1-21)



Life lesson: When we trust God, especially in difficult circumstances, and direct others to look to God (for his leadership and guidance), it encourages them to grow in their trust in God and confidence in our leadership.

The Israelites grumble against Moses.

Three times the Israelites grumble against Moses and falsely accuse him when they lack water and food (Exodus 15:22-26; 16:1-15; 17:1-7). Instead of getting angry, Moses cries out to the Lord for His solutions to the problems. Moses teaches the people to trust in God as their provider.

C. ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY AT MOUNT SINAI

God's covenant with Israel

Moses leads the people to Mount Sinai, where God reaffirms the covenant He made to Abraham. God wants Israel to be His treasured people representing Him and His ways to the nations (Exodus 19:3-6). God speaks the Ten Commandments to all the people which reveal how to live as His people. Moses then goes up the mountain for 40 days to receive the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets by God (Exodus 24:12, 18).

The golden calf. Exodus 32:1-20, 30-35 (full story - Exodus 32:1-35)

1. Why is worshiping the golden calf such a shocking sin?
2. What do you see about Moses' heart for the rebellious people he was leading?

The shocking sin of Israel. While God is writing down the Ten Commandments up on the mountain, the Israelites are breaking them below. They quickly turn away from their commitment to keep God's covenant by making and worshiping a golden calf. Following the practices of the Egyptians (whose chief god was represented by a bull), the Israelites demand a visible god (Exodus 32:4-5; Psalm 106:19-21; Acts 7:39-41). They disobey the second commandment that protects the proper view and worship of God - no physical image can represent an infinite living God (Exodus 20:4-5).



Moses' heart for his people. God tells Moses that He will destroy the stubbornly sinful Israelites and start over again with Moses. Moses instead shows concern for God's reputation. He intercedes on behalf of Israel, pleading for God to show mercy and to change His mind. God listens to Moses' prayer and doesn't destroy Israel (Exodus 32:11-14; Psalm 106:23). Later, Moses' sacrificial love is again revealed when he offers to be wiped out of God's book of life in exchange for God's forgiveness of wayward Israel.



Life Lesson: Humble leaders seek to honor God's reputation above personal success. They have a strong, sacrificial commitment towards those they lead. (Philippians 2:3)



Reflection Questions

1. How do you respond when others criticize your leadership? What is a humble response to complaining and criticism?
2. In what ways are you sacrificially serving others and helping them to grow in their relationship with God?



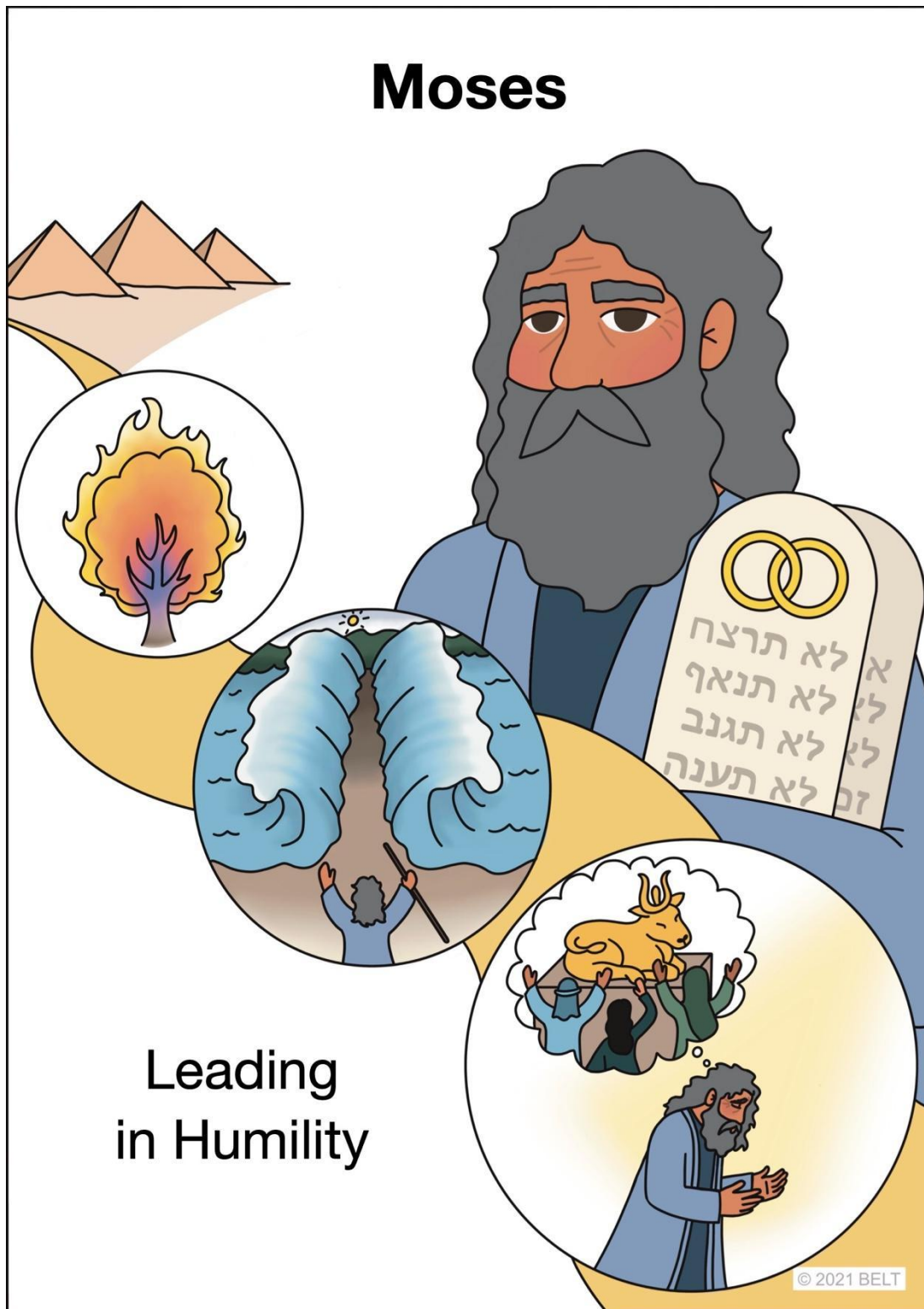
Application Activity

- *Intercede for your community.* Pray with others from your area that God would give you His heart for your community. Intercede for those that do not know God and pray that the Holy Spirit would bring conviction of sin. Pray for God's kingdom to come. Pray for opportunities to share friendship and truth with them.
- *Give a secret blessing.* Tape a piece of blank paper on everyone's back. Participants walk around the room and record messages of affirmation and encouraging verses on each other's backs. No one signs their name. In this way, each participant is built up in their faith and no one receives attention or credit for any remarks. Secretly blessing others puts humility into action.



Poster Description

Forty years after disgraced Moses flees from Egypt (background), God calls to him from a burning bush to lead His people out of slavery (left circle). Moses grows in humility as he leads Israel to trust God for deliverance from Pharaoh's army (middle circle). At Mount Sinai, God gives the Ten Commandments, an important part of living in covenant with God (ring symbol on tablets). While Moses is on the mountain, the Israelites make and worship a golden calf. Moses deeply intercedes for God to forgive their sin (right circle).



JOSHUA

Hearing and Courageously Obeying God

Summary

After the death of Moses, Joshua is chosen by God to become the new leader of Israel. Joshua seeks God, listens for His voice and courageously obeys Him. God uses him to conquer strong and fortified Canaan, the land promised to Israel in God's covenant with Abraham. Throughout his life, Joshua is a powerful encouragement to Israel to follow God.



Historical Background

After God gives Israel the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, He also gives instructions to set up the Tabernacle. This elaborate tent (containing the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments) is where God's presence would dwell among His people in the middle of the camp. God leads the Israelites from Mount Sinai to the border of Canaan. He instructs them to completely destroy the Canaanites who are extremely immoral and wicked as judgment against them (Leviticus 18:2-27), which God delayed for more than 400 years (Gen 15:16). This was also to prevent His people from being corrupted by their evil ways. But when the people of Israel hear of the Canaanites' strong armies and large fortified cities, they refuse to enter Canaan (Numbers 13:25-33). So God disciplines Israel for their unbelief and they wander around the desert for 40 years (Numbers 14:22-33). God raises up a new generation of Israelites who have faith in Him to conquer Canaan.

A. JOSHUA LEARNS FROM HIS MENTOR

Joshua's growing leadership

Joshua remains close to Moses and is his faithful assistant from his youth (Numbers 11:28). From the example of Moses, Joshua learns to listen for God's instructions and to follow Him closely. He learns to boldly intercede and to be full of faith. He watches Moses' strength of character and courage that is needed to lead well.

So Moses entrusts Joshua with growing responsibilities, including watching over the sacred Tent of Meeting outside the camp. This is where Moses meets with God prior to the construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 33:7, 11). Joshua is also trusted to spy out the land of Canaan with 11 others, where he shows remarkable courage and faith. When the people of Israel refuse to enter the land, he boldly declares to trust God for victory (Numbers 14:2-10).



A reminder of God's plan

Before he dies, Moses reminds Joshua and Israel of the importance of honoring God's laws in the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 30:9-10). Not only would this bring God's blessing upon them, but also powerful influence upon the surrounding nations as they hear of Israel's wise and righteous laws and see a God so near.

God encourages Joshua as Israel's new leader. Joshua 1:1-9

1. What does God say is necessary for Joshua's success as a new leader? (See also Deuteronomy 34:9)
2. Joshua learns from Moses - by watching, listening, and interacting with him. Who is giving godly and wise input into your life? Who are you mentoring?

God's instructions for Joshua. As God's chosen leader, Joshua demonstrates he trusts God and has the strength of character necessary to lead the Israelites into Canaan. God inspires courage by

repeatedly promising to be with Joshua in this daunting task. Joshua will have success in Canaan by listening to God's voice and living by God's laws.



Life Lesson: Courage comes from knowing the One leading you is trustworthy. So God desires His leaders to know Him well through knowing His Word and being in His presence. In this way, they will be able to fight against the enemy and take the inheritance God has for them.

B. JOSHUA'S CONQUEST OF CANAAN

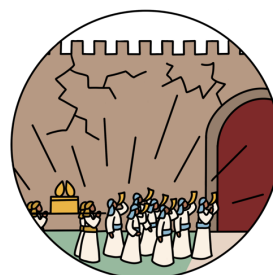
Israelites cross the Jordan River on dry ground

Many of the new generation have not experienced God's powerful deliverance from Egypt. They now experience God enabling them to miraculously cross the swollen Jordan River during flood season on dry ground. This builds faith in them (Joshua 4:23-24), confidence in Joshua's leadership (Joshua 4:14), and also creates fear and discouragement in the Canaanites (Joshua 5:1).

*The battle of Jericho. Joshua 5:13-6:27 ***

1. How do you see Joshua successfully leading Israel?
2. Why does God give Joshua an unusual military strategy for Israel's first battle in Canaan?

God fights for Israel. Joshua listens to, and obeys, God to experience victory over the strongly protected, thick-walled border city of Jericho. He leads the people of Israel in obedience to God's risky and unusual battle plan. (In the Bible, the number 7 often indicates completion and fulfillment. Through this, the Israelites know that God will fight for them and fulfill His promise to Abraham.) With the ark in their midst, Israel is reminded that the Lord is present with them. With a faith-filled shout, the mighty walls of Jericho fall down. This strongest Canaan fortress (an important historical, cultural, and political center) is completely destroyed.



Life Lesson: God wants to partner with His people to win victories. Waiting patiently for His strategies and His timing is important for success.

C. JOSHUA FAILS TO CONSULT GOD

The Gibeonites deceive Joshua. Joshua 9:1-21

1. What mistake did Joshua and the leaders make? What is the result of this decision?
2. Discuss the results of a poor decision you made because of wrong assumptions or failure to seek God for His insights.

Joshua's wrong assumptions. Instead of looking to God, Joshua and the leaders of Israel rely on themselves to make a major decision that would affect all of Israel. As a result, they are tricked and make a peace treaty with their enemy. Israel's large army could have easily defeated the small force. But now, they must uphold the treaty forever, and even help the Gibeonites' in their battle (Joshua 10). The people of Israel are angry and their confidence in their leaders is diminished.



Life Lesson: We cannot know the motives of others. Rather than relying only on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6), give opportunity for God's perspective, particularly in big decisions that impact the ones we lead.

The importance of keeping your word. When Saul later attempts to remove the Gibeonites from Israel, God sends a 3 year famine as a consequence (2 Samuel 21:1-2). Just as God upholds covenants, He expects the same of the Israelites - and us.

Joshua finishes well. After the major cities of Canaan are defeated, Joshua divides the land among the 12 tribes of Israel as God instructed. Each tribe is commanded to finish conquering the remaining people, as well as to obey God's laws fully to experience ongoing success and blessing. The Israelites continue to follow God during the lifetime of Joshua because of his consistent righteous example and godly leadership (Joshua 24:31).



Reflection Questions

1. As God gave Joshua a different strategy for each city, are you seeking the Lord for His guidance in the details when making decisions for your life and ministry?
2. Do you have a regular habit of reading and meditating on God's Word, seeking to apply it to your life and leadership? What are the results of doing this (or what could the results be)?
3. Like the Gibeonites, Satan is a deceiver. Do you daily put on the armor of God to fight against his schemes (Ephesians 6:10-17)? Which has been most helpful to you?



Application Activity

Crossing the Jordan. What is the vision or plans God has given you for your life or ministry? Do you have any unbelief or fears about seeing these things fulfilled? Write these down on a piece of paper. On a second piece of paper, write down what God is saying to you about these fears. What promises is He giving you? Take time to listen (see Further Study). Symbolically cross over the Jordan River, leaving the paper with fears behind you and carrying the paper with the promises of God into the Promised Land.

Waiting on God. Take time to hear from the Father about His strategy for fighting against the darkness in your city or community. Follow the principles listed below.

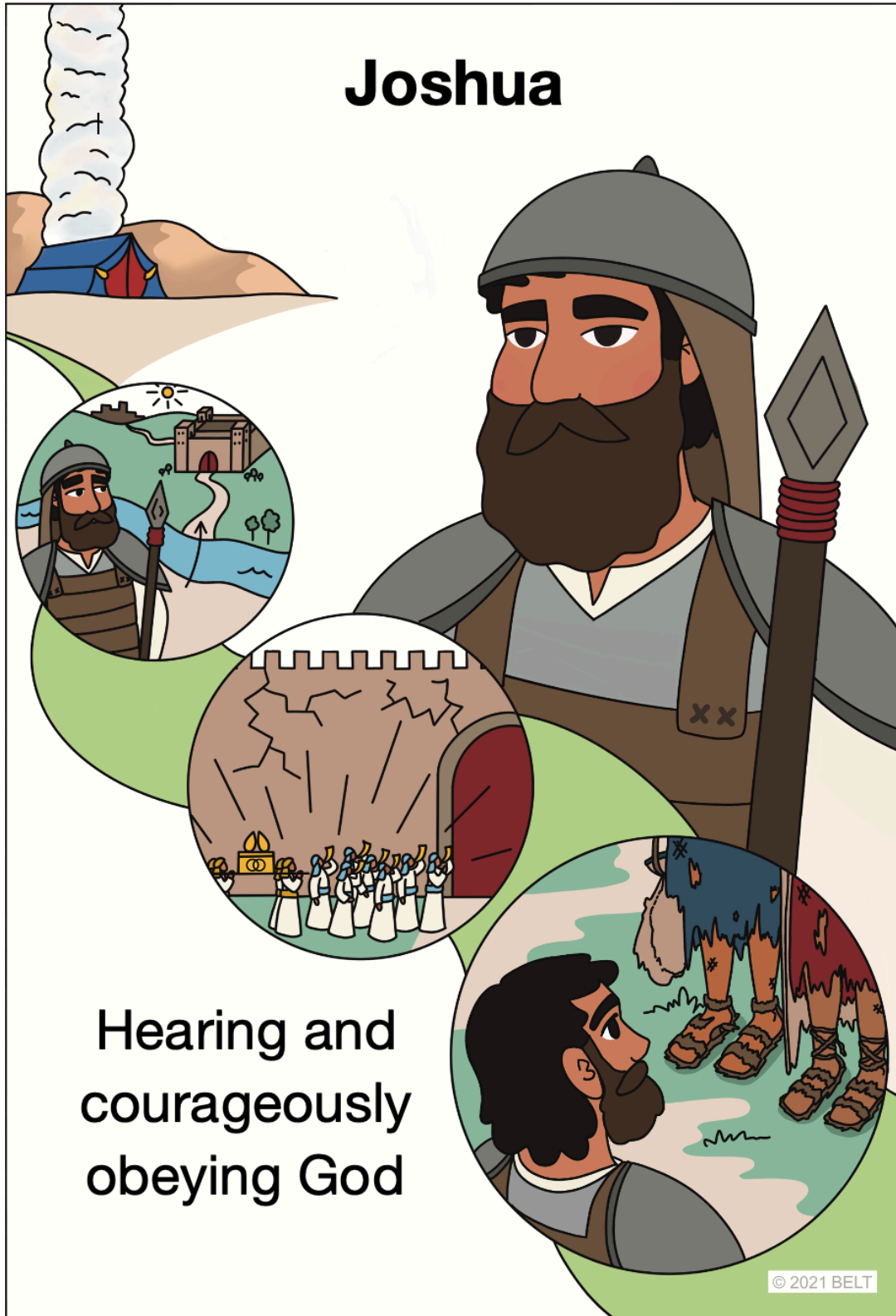
Principles of hearing God's voice:

- Praise God for the ability and opportunity to hear Him.
- Prepare yourself - confess any sin; put aside your own ideas.
- Resist Satan from influencing your thoughts.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to speak.
- Wait and listen to God (which could include Scripture, songs, words or pictures in your mind).
- Thank God for speaking.



Poster Description

As a growing military leader (large image), Joshua guards the sacred Tent of Meeting (background). When Moses, his mentor, dies, God encourages Joshua to obey His law in order to have success in conquering Canaan (left circle). Joshua and Israel courageously follow God's unusual plan to defeat fortified Jericho (middle circle). When Joshua does not consult God, he is tricked by the Gibeonites (right circle).



DEBORAH

Supporting Women in Leadership

Summary

Deborah, along with other women in the Bible, shows godly and faithful character, as well as fearless and wise leadership in her calling from God. She accomplishes His work and purposes in her generation. God is not limited by cultural or gender barriers and will use anyone who is trustworthy and longs after Him.



Historical Background

After settling in the Promised Land, Israel has no visible king ruling over them. Each of the twelve tribes are governed by elders, living under God's rule and laws (God is their king). Sadly, after Joshua and his generation dies, the people of Israel begin to forget God and His laws. This begins a period of 400 years when everyone lives the way they want to (Judges 21:25). Violence and wickedness increase in the land. The book of Judges records seven repeated cycles of sin. Deborah is one of twelve judges (including Gideon and Samson) who God raises up and anoints with His Spirit to defeat their enemies. They urge Israel to follow God and His laws once again.

A. DEBORAH JUDGES ISRAEL

Israel's fourth cycle of sin. Judges 4:1-7; 5:26-28, 31

The Israelites sin against God. God gives them into the hands of Jabin, a Canaanite King, and he severely oppresses them for 20 years. The Israelites cry out to the Lord in repentance. God hears their cries and raises up a deliverer named Deborah. After a great victory, the land has peace for over 40 years.

*Deborah's wise leadership. Judges 4:4-24 ***

1. What do you learn about Deborah's character and leadership from her story (Judges 5:3-5, 11, 31)?
2. Compare Deborah's leadership to that of Joshua and Moses (see also Exodus 18:13-16).
3. What have you learned about how God views women in leadership from the story of Deborah?

Deborah's success. Deborah knows God and His ways at a time when most of Israel is unfaithful to God. Deborah is a prophet (has authority given by God to speak on His behalf). She is also a respected judge. The people of Israel, both men and women, come to her to have their disputes decided. She gives direction to Barak, commander of Israel's army, and his men. She bravely joins with them at the battle front (where they are greatly outnumbered) as Barak is afraid to go without her. They obey Deborah's orders and have great success. Deborah displays unshakable faith in God and remarkable courage to obey in a very dangerous situation when even Barak, the military commander, lacks courage.



Appointed by God. In Deborah, we see the same courageous leadership that we see in Joshua. Like Moses, Deborah is anointed by God to hold the role of judge and prophet to Israel. God uses Deborah to speak His words to the people, to teach and to make judgments based on God's law. She is God's appointed leader to deliver Israel from their oppressors along with the eleven other judges during this increasingly unstable period.

Jael's courage and honor. As a rebuke to Barak's weakness and fears (predicted by Deborah), a woman (Jael) kills Sisera. He is the powerful commander of the enemy army of Jabin, king of Canaan. This ends 20 years of servitude and severe oppression in Israel. (Judges 4:8-9,17-24)



Life Lesson: God will use anyone who has godly character, both men and women, to further His plans on the earth

B. MARY'S INFLUENCE ON JESUS

Mary's impact

1. Share about women who have had a significant influence on your life.
2. How do we see Mary's influence at strategic times in God's plan of restoration? John 2:1-11; John 19:25-27

Leadership is influence. God calls Mary to play a major role in the life of Jesus whose death and resurrection is the climax of God's plan of restoration. Mary would have had enormous influence on Jesus as a boy as she taught Him the ways of God. Mary encourages Jesus to step into His calling at the wedding of Cana, where Jesus performs His first miracle (John 2:1-11). Though most of His disciples scatter, Mary is with Jesus at His crucifixion, supporting Him in His most difficult hour (John 19:25-27). Mary never holds a formal position of authority, but is honored because of her godly character and influence on Jesus.



Life Lesson: Leadership is about influence in the lives of others, regardless of formal positions or titles. Through our influence, we can shape people's lives and impact destinies.

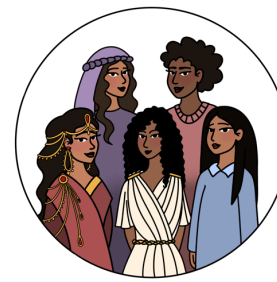
C. GOD USES WOMEN

The ministries of women in the Bible

1. Based on the Scriptures below, what are your observations of how God uses and releases women in ministry?
2. Consider the implications for women from Peter's message. Acts 2:14-18
3. In what ways does your culture or church encourage women in leadership? In what ways can they improve?

Other godly women in leadership roles

- **Miriam.** Miriam is one of three people, along with her younger brothers, Moses and Aaron, used by God to deliver Israel from their slavery in Egypt. She is a prophet and leads out in praise to God after passing through the Red Sea. Micah 6:4; Exodus 15:19-21
- **Esther.** A fearless leader, queen Esther uses her influence with the king to preserve the Jewish people. Esther 4:7-16
- **Huldah.** God uses Huldah the prophet to boldly speak the word of the Lord to King Josiah. (Huldah was used by God in the same way He used Elijah and Elisha, to be His spokesmen to kings.) 2 Kings 22:11-20



- *Anna*. The prophet Anna confirms baby Jesus is the promised Messiah. (Luke 2:36-38)
- *Phoebe*. Phoebe was a deaconess, praised and recommended by Paul to the Roman church (Romans 16:1-2). The Greek word for deaconess is the same Greek word Paul uses for church leaders (1 Timothy 3:8, 11).
- *Priscilla*. Both Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, work as ministry partners with Paul (Romans 16:3). They are also leaders of a house church (1 Corinthians 16:19). Both of them correct a powerful preacher named Apollos, explaining to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:24-26). Priscilla's name gets mentioned before her husband's in several places in Paul's writings, indicating that she is probably the main teacher in their ministry as a couple. Paul welcomes Priscilla as an equal minister of God alongside him. (Paul doesn't stop her from teaching.)
- *Lydia*. Believers gather at this business woman's home where she is an early church leader. (Acts 16:14-15, 40)

All people will prophesy

God promises, through the prophet Joel, that He will pour out His Spirit on all people and both men and women will prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter confirms that time had come

(Acts 2:17-18). All daughters and sons of God have been given the privilege to declare His Word, testify to His salvation, and prophesy by His Spirit. God gives gifts to everyone (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) to participate in His plan of restoration. He does not show partiality (Acts 10:34-35). By not supporting women in leadership, we limit what God desires to accomplish in the earth through His people.



Reflection Questions

1. How have you been challenged or encouraged by this lesson?
2. Consider practical ways to encourage and support women in their callings. How can you make room for them in positions of leadership in your community or church?



Application Activity

Encouraging women in leadership. Allow time for God to examine hearts. If there is anyone with a distorted view of women in leadership, give them the opportunity to go to God in repentance. (There may be women in the room they need to apologize to as well.)

Have the men encircle the women as a symbol of honor and support. Have them pray over the women that God will use them in their God-given roles and giftings, including roles of leadership. Finish by speaking Aaron's blessing over the women from Numbers 6:24-26.



Poster Description

As a prophet, Deborah teaches the law and gives judgments to Israel (background). She was one of the leaders God used to deliver His people (Deborah holding scales of justice). Deborah directs Barak into battle against Sisera (left circle). God uses Mary, an influential woman, at a strategic time in God's story of restoration (middle circle). God uses women - past and present - in positions of authority and leadership to further His plan of restoration on the earth (right circle).



DAVID

Pursuing God with a Pure Heart

Summary

David's life demonstrates that loving God with a pure heart is the primary quality God looks for in a leader. This kind of leader - who seeks to know God, who cares about God's honor, and repents deeply for sin - God blesses and uses.



Historical Background

After 400 years of the judges, Israel rejects God's rulership and demands a visible king like all the other ungodly nations around them. God gives them a king, but warns them of negative consequences that will result (1 Samuel 8:4-17). During the next 120 years, the 12 tribes form a united kingdom under the first three kings. God rejects Saul, Israel's first king, because of his disobedience. God chooses David, a young shepherd boy, to be Israel's second king because he has a heart after God. Israel's third king, Solomon (David's son), starts off well and builds God's temple. World leaders come to listen to his great wisdom. He has an amazing opportunity to spread the knowledge of the true God throughout the earth (God's plan for Israel). Tragically, Solomon turns from God as he gives royal approval to the worship of idols from his many foreign wives.

A. DAVID'S PREPARATION AND HEART FOR GOD

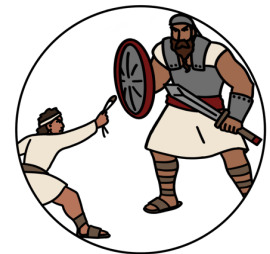
David anointed as king

God chooses David, a lowly shepherd and the youngest and most unlikely of Jesse's eight sons, to be the next king of Israel. Though overlooked by others, David is handpicked by God because he has a heart after God. (Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 16:1-13). A leader who loves God and His laws will be a powerful influence for righteousness and justice in the land.

*David defeats Goliath. 1 Samuel 17:3-11, 31-52 (full story - 1 Sam 17:1-52) ***

1. How do David's past experiences help prepare him to defeat Goliath (and lead a nation)?
2. What motivates David to defeat Goliath?

David's early preparation. David's relationship with God seems to have grown greatly during his early years as a lowly shepherd. Through many hours of solitude, David meditates on God to know Him and His ways (Psalm 23). Through dangers and difficulties, his character and confidence in God grow, as well as his mastery of the slingshot. All these prepare him to defend God's reputation (not build his own) against the ungodly giant, Goliath - the champion fighter of the Philistine army.



Life Lesson: Don't underestimate the potential of your circumstances to prepare you for what God has next for you. Allow each challenge to build godly character and dependence on God. And just like David, you may feel overlooked by others, but know God sees you. He delights in using those whose hearts are fully His (2 Chronicles 16:9).

B. DAVID'S TRAGIC SIN WITH BATHSHEBA

God makes a covenant with David

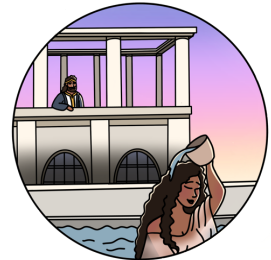
After Saul and his son Jonathan are killed in battle, the people make David king (2 Samuel 5:1-5). God gives David victory over all the enemies of Israel establishing its dominance in the region. God makes a covenant with David and promises that he will be great and one of his descendants will sit on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Many generations later, Jesus, the promised Messiah, comes from the lineage of David to forever rule a kingdom that will never end (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:31-33).

David's adultery with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11:1-27

1. Describe the process of David's sexual temptation with Bathsheba.
2. Contrast Uriah's loyalty with David's wicked actions.

David's process of temptation. Instead of being out fighting with his army against Israel's enemies, King David is relaxing at home in Jerusalem. There David discovers Bathsheba bathing. Instead of turning away immediately (as Joseph does in Egypt), he gazes at her beauty, then inquires into who she is. Learning she is married to Uriah, David still commits adultery with her.

David's wickedness against loyal Uriah. David abuses his power and breaks the just laws he is supposed to enforce as king (God's laws against adultery and murder). He orders others to conspire with him in his secret sins (the palace officials and Joab). David betrays Uriah (a man so honorable and loyal that he refuses to go home to be with his wife while his men are at war). Uriah, along with Bathsheba's father (Eliam), are two of David's "mighty men", his most trusted, and skilled soldiers (2 Samuel 23:8, 34, 39). Despite this, David has Uriah mercilessly murdered on the front lines of battle. Then David selfishly takes Uriah's wife for himself, even though David already has many wives.



Life lesson: Sin is truly selfish and damages trust in our leadership and other relationships. If not repented of immediately, sin leads to deception and more sin.

C. DAVID'S REPENTANCE

David's sin is uncovered. 2 Samuel 12:1-15

1. What does Nathan's story reveal to David about himself? What is David's response after being exposed?
2. Why is David's sin against God?
3. In the Psalms, how does David describe the inner turmoil during the months of secret unconfessed sin? What do David's songs reveal about his repentance? Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 16-17

David betrays God. God chose David to lead His people in honoring Him. They were to be a righteous example to those around them (Exodus 19:5-6). David's wickedness dishonors God's holy name and gives unbelievers an excuse to reject God and continue in sin (see Romans 2:22-24; Ezekiel 36:20-23).

David's brokenness over sin. David's writings reveal how his unconfessed sin resulted in guilt and shame that consumed his joy for God and affected his physical health. David is broken over his sin and appeals to God's mercy to cleanse his wayward heart.

The impact of David's sin. Though David's sin is forgiven, the consequences of his sin continue on. Not only does the son of Bathsheba die (2 Samuel 12:14), David's sinful example has a devastating effect on his family. David's daughter, Tamar, is raped by her half-brother (2 Samuel 13:1-19). Three of his oldest sons are killed in internal family conflict (2 Samuel 12:9-10, 13:28-29, 18:14; 1 Kings 2:25). Absalom, David's son, revolts against him (2 Samuel 15).



Life lesson. God is deeply grieved over the sin of His people. Sin destroys families and communities, dishonors God and turns away unbelievers. God works to expose sin and restore sinners, but adultery and sexual sin have lasting and destructive consequences from which it is difficult to recover.

David's restoration

David painfully walks the path to wholeness through repentance. Though David grieved God's heart, God isn't finished with him. David is an example of getting up after a devastating moral failure (Proverbs 24:16). He goes on to begin preparations to build a magnificent temple for God in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 22:7-19). His last words to his son Solomon and his officials are to devote their hearts to seek the Lord. David fully understands the importance of guarding his heart to keep it pure (Proverbs 4:23) and he finishes his life in this way.



Reflection Questions

1. David was considered a man after God's own heart. He loved God deeply, knew Him well, and was concerned for His honor. He earnestly sought God's forgiveness when he sinned. Evaluate yourself in these areas.
2. Do you have any secret or unconfessed sexual sin? If so, humbly confess these sins to God and a trusted person and ask for prayer (James 5:16).



Application Activity

Exposing sexual sin. In small groups (men and women separately), discuss the destructiveness of sexual sin in your community, your church and your own life (if you feel comfortable). Discuss practical ways to overcome sexual temptation. (See the Further Study section for some discussion points.) Share an area you may be struggling in with a trusted friend and then pray for victory.



Further Study (Optional)

The destructiveness of sexual sin

- *The purpose of sex.* God created sex to be mutually satisfying and strongly unifying between a husband and wife within the boundaries of a healthy marriage - a committed, unselfish and close relationship (Genesis 2:24-25).
- *Sexual sin is selfish and addictive.* Sexual activity outside of the boundary of marriage is selfish and dangerous (Proverbs 6:32-33; 5:20-23). Like a burning fire, sexual desire is difficult to stop once it is ignited. Pornography, like a drug, is addictive. It is arousing and connected with sexual gratification.
- *Destructive consequences of sexual sin.* Sexual sin can lead to physical harm (sexually transmitted diseases, etc), emotional scarring (shame, relational numbness) and

spiritual deadness (a hard heart towards God). It can also have other damaging consequences like broken marriages and unwanted pregnancies.

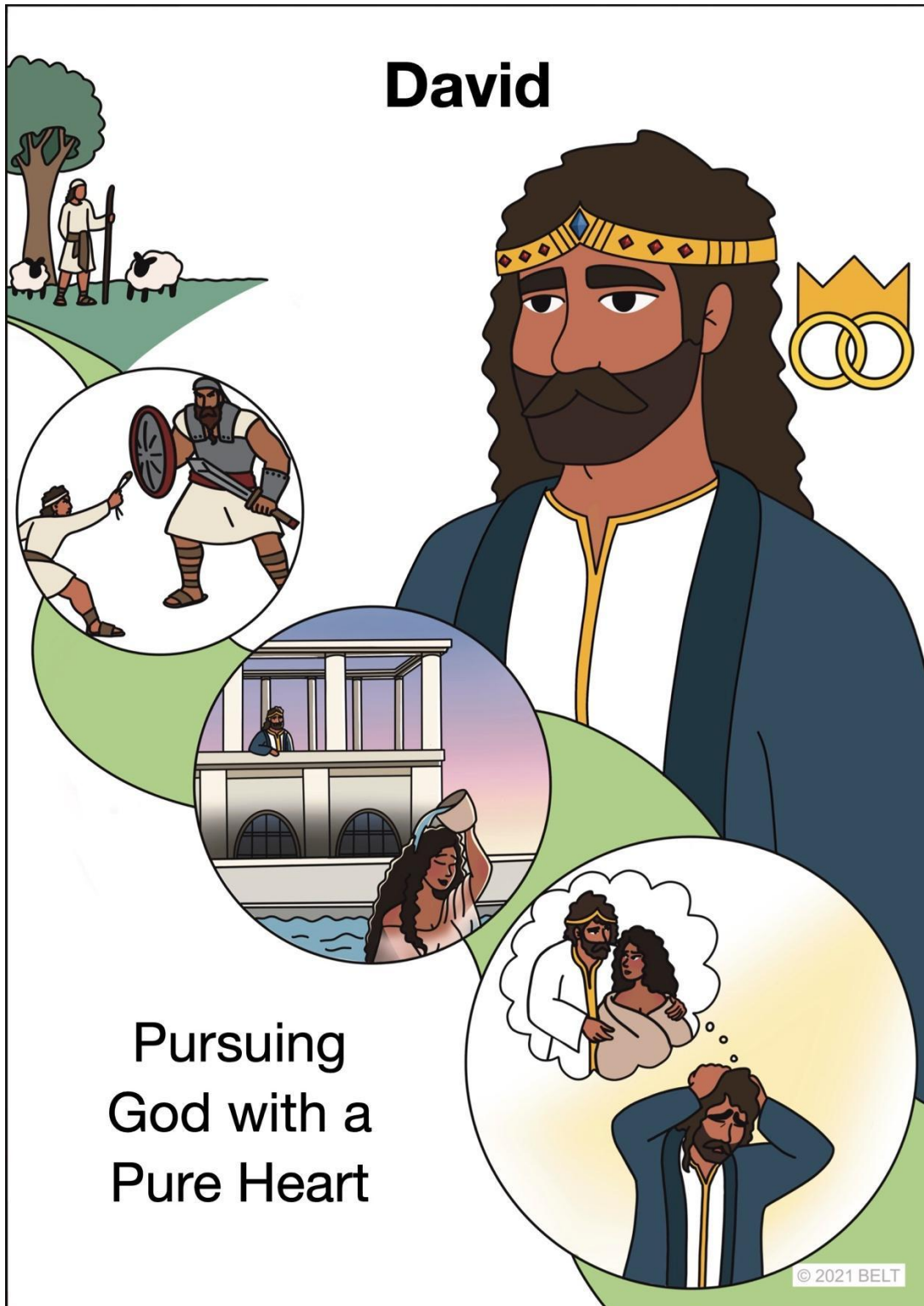
Overcoming temptation

- *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 8:13-14
- *Flee temptation immediately.* The longer you delay, the stronger the temptation. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:22 (Joseph - 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 strong believers. James 5:16
- *Practice the spiritual disciplines.* Practice fasting, 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

As a shepherd boy (background), David learns valuable lessons which prepare him to defeat the ungodly Goliath (left circle). After David becomes king, God promises that one of his descendants will sit on his throne forever (rings with crown). Tragically, David abuses his power as king and commits adultery with Bathsheba (middle circle) and murders her husband. When God exposes his sin, David deeply repents, but still reaps the destructive consequences of his wicked act (right circle).



DANIEL

Working with Excellence

Summary

Daniel is faithful, honest and excellent in his work. He rejects compromise and obeys God. His godly character and God-given abilities lead others to notice the God he follows. God is able to use him to further His plan of preservation and restoration for Israel and, ultimately, the world.



Historical Background

After the idolatry of King Solomon, God divides the kingdom of Israel into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah) for the next 350 years until the time of the exile. After many calls to repentance and warnings of judgment by God's prophets, God uses the Assyrians to completely destroy the extremely wicked Northern Kingdom as a way to contain sin. God eventually also disciplines Judah for its great wickedness and widespread idolatry. God raises up Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who takes Judah into captivity and destroys Jerusalem and the temple. He takes the most educated of the young men to Babylon, among which are Daniel and his friends. God uses them to influence the kings of their captivity to issue decrees to preserve the people of Judah (who are called Jews) during the 70 years of their exile. After the defeat of the Babylonians, God directs Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, to allow the Jews to return to their homeland. Some Jews return to Judah in three separate groups where they rebuild God's temple, His people and Jerusalem's walls. Idolatry is never a problem for the Jewish nation again. God's plan of restoration is back on track.

A. DANIEL IS PROMOTED IN BABYLON

Daniel's faithfulness to God. Daniel 1:1-21

1. What does this story reveal about Daniel's character?
2. What gifts and abilities does God give Daniel to influence the king?
3. What are the unique gifts and abilities that God has given you? (If you are not sure, ask others what they observe in you.) How can you maximize these in the work and calling God has for you?

God gives Daniel a special gift. Daniel and his friends are upright and uncompromising in their character and all they do. Unlike the other Jews in the king's service, they negotiate with the official to not eat the king's food. (The king's food is unclean because of the type of food, improper preparation or it was offered to idols.) God honors their faithfulness, gives them favor with the official, and gives them greater understanding than the other young men. The king of Babylon recognises their superior wisdom and promotes them to high positions. To Daniel, God also gives the special gift of interpreting dreams. He is then able to influence the kings of Babylon to favor and protect the Jews during their Babylonian captivity.



Life Lesson. God gives people unique gifts and abilities. To those who are faithful stewards, He gives greater responsibilities (Matthew 25:20-23). He partners with those of godly character to accomplish His purposes in their communities.

Daniel becomes a ruler in Babylon. Daniel 2:1-5, 10-19, 24-30, 46-49

King Nebuchadnezzar conquers all the ancient world. He has total power to do whatever he desires. In his rage, he orders the death of all the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel, when his own advisors can't answer his impossible request. As captives in Babylon, the Jews are at risk of the unpredictable demands of each king (see also Daniel 5:18-19). God uses Daniel's gift of interpreting dreams to bring honor to His great name and to promote Daniel and his Jewish friends to high positions of influence in Babylon.

B. DANIEL WARNS ANOTHER BABYLONIAN KING

The writing on the wall. Daniel 5:1-31

1. What does this story reveal about Belshazzar, king of Babylon?
2. Describe the character of Daniel in this story.

Daniel interprets the mysterious message. King Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar, in his pride dishonors God. He uses the items from God's temple in a banquet to worship the Babylonian gods. Daniel, who has a reputation for great wisdom, is summoned to interpret the mysterious writing that appears on the wall. Daniel refuses to interpret the message for financial or personal gain. At great risk to himself, he condemns the arrogance of King Belshazzar and declares God's coming judgment on Babylon. That very night, the Medes and Persians capture the city of Babylon and Belshazzar is killed.



Life lesson: God honors those who use their abilities not for personal gain and selfish ambition, but to serve and glorify Him.

C. DANIEL INFLUENCES THE MEDES AND PERSIANS

*Daniel in the lion's den. Daniel 6:1-28 ***

1. What does this story show about Daniel's character as a government official? What is the source of his excellent character?
2. What do you observe about Daniel's impact on pagan king Darius? How does this further God's plan of restoration?

Daniel's excellent character. Daniel shows he is loyal, trustworthy, not negligent nor corrupt in his work. So King Darius, the king of the new empire of the Medes and Persians, completely trusts Daniel and wants to place him in the highest position over the whole kingdom. King Darius notes that Daniel serves God continuously. Daniel's regular connection with God through prayer is the source of his excellent character and wise leadership. When God protects Daniel from the lions, King Darius has a growing revelation of the true and living God. He proclaims God's greatness throughout his empire. In this way, God is made famous and the Jews are preserved in God's plan of restoration.





Life lesson: As believers, being trustworthy, upright and diligent in our work and ministry impacts God's reputation and fame in our communities. Maintaining a close friendship with God grows our character and influence.



Reflection Questions

1. Evaluate your motivation in your work or ministry. Is your goal to serve God and His purposes or is your goal personal gain?
2. Colossians 3:23 talks about doing your best as to the Lord. Is the quality of your work honoring to God?



Application Activity

Working with excellence self-evaluation. Read through these qualities we see in Daniel. Underline areas that are weak in your life. Focus on 1 or 2 areas to strengthen. Share these with another person for accountability. Pray together.

- Honest
- Hard-working
- Uncompromising in godly character; not corrupt
- Trustworthy
- Faithful (even in small things)
- Good reputation (including with non-believers)
- Uses skills and talents to bring honor to God
- Practices self-control in habits



Further Study (Optional)

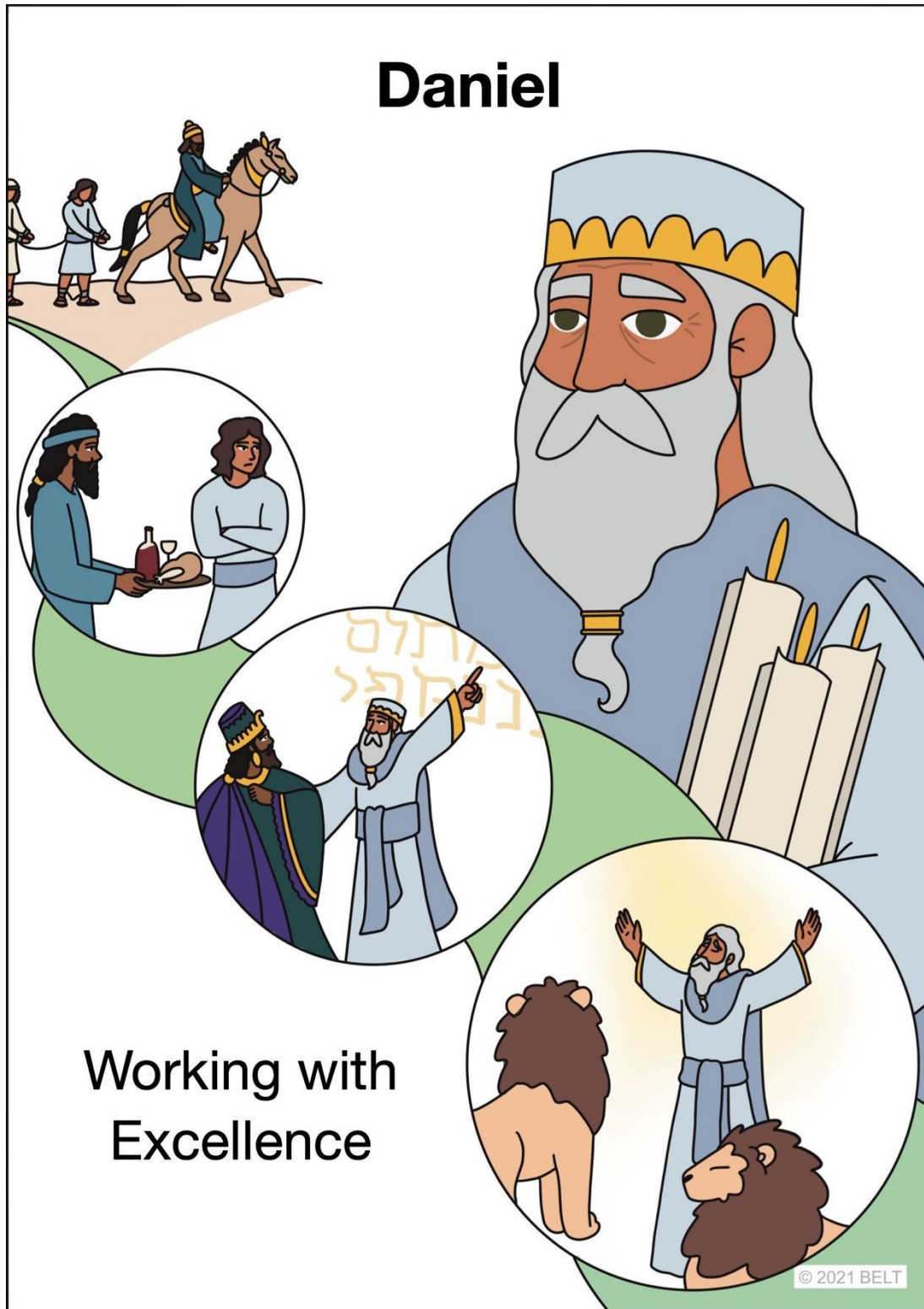
Wisdom from Proverbs about work. King Solomon describes important qualities for work which are linked to honor, satisfaction, and prosperity. These glorify God and grow out of our character and love for God.

- *Excellence in skill* (Proverbs 22:29; Psalms 78:72). Planning (Proverbs 21:5; 27:23-27; 31:18).
- *Excellence in character* (Proverbs 22:1, 4). Hard working (Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4-5; 12:24; 28:19-20). Honest and trustworthy in words (Proverbs 10:18-19; 12:22; 16:13) and in deeds (Proverbs 11:1; 17:23; 20:17). Just and fair (Proverbs 16:8; 22:16).



Poster Description

After the capture of Judah, Daniel is taken to Babylon (background) where he refuses to compromise his faith by eating the king's defiled food (left circle). Daniel is promoted to high positions in both kingdoms of Babylon and the Medes and Persians because of his wisdom, godly character and special gifts (Daniel holding scrolls). At King Belshazzar's feast, Daniel interprets the mysterious writing that appears, refusing financial gain (middle circle). King Darius' honors Daniel and his God after he is rescued from the lions (right circle).

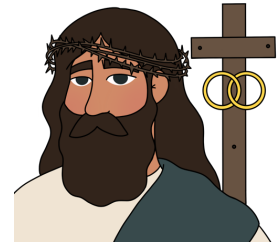


JESUS

Leading as a Servant

Summary

Jesus defines and models what kingdom leaders should be like. Unlike authoritarian leaders, Jesus leads through humility, service and sacrifice. He affirms people's value (including the least) and empowers them to succeed in their life and calling. His teachings on leadership provide guiding principles to His disciples and the early church, and continue to be relevant for us today.



Historical Background

Following the Jews' return from exile, there are 400 years of silence, when God's prophets are not speaking. But God is still actively preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah. The Greeks, who conquer the Persians, establish a common trade language in the empire. (As a result, the Scriptures in the Greek language can be read throughout the ancient world.) The Romans, who conquer the Greeks, build roads and provide ease of travel and safety throughout the empire. (In this way, the Gospel can spread quickly through the empire.) The Jews, who are dispersed into most major cities of the Roman Empire, build synagogues and read the Law and prophets weekly (creating an expectation for the coming Messiah). Then, at just the right time, God sends His only Son to rescue people from their sins. This is the promised new covenant for all people and the climax of God's plan of restoration. Jesus is born into poverty in Bethlehem to a virgin named Mary (a direct descendant of King David). He grows up in the despised town of Nazareth, in the region of Galilee. Jesus begins His ministry at the age of 30. For three years, He proclaims the message of the kingdom of light, and performs miraculous signs and healings throughout Galilee.

A. JESUS DEVELOPS HIS DISCIPLES

The discipleship methods of Jesus. Luke 8:1-2, 9-11, 24-25, 51-56; 9:1-6, 12-13, 40-41

1. How does Jesus train His disciples and prepare them to be part of His plan of restoration?
2. What are the disciples like after completing their training? Acts 4:8-14

Preparing His disciples to do greater things. Jesus prayerfully chooses twelve ordinary men and empowers them to be His representatives and leaders in the early church (Luke 6:12-13). He models keys to spiritual growth: the practice of prayer, fasting, solitude, knowing the Word, and hearing from God. He instructs His disciples and answers their questions. He models what He teaches. He loves them when they fail and misunderstand Him, and He challenges them to grow (John 6:5-6). Jesus sends them out to do what He did - and to do even greater things (John 14:12). He reviews their experiences and celebrates their victories (Luke 10:1, 17-21).



The students become like their teacher. The Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem are amazed that these ordinary, uneducated men are now doing the same remarkable things Jesus had done. Jesus' effective leadership and discipleship training (Luke 6:40), plus the empowering of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8), produces leaders that impact the world.



Life Lesson: Kingdom leaders reproduce other leaders. Through modeling and coaching, trust and encouragement, Jesus-style leaders enable others to do greater things than themselves. They are not threatened by others' success, rather celebrate it.

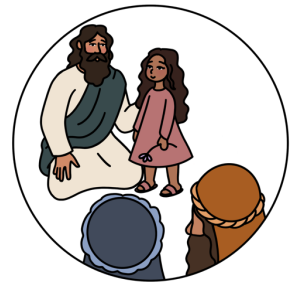
B. JESUS TEACHES ABOUT GREATNESS

The disciples argue about who is the greatest. Mark 9:33-37; 10:42-45

1. Why does Jesus use a small child to teach this lesson on greatness?
2. Contrast how Jesus says greatness is practiced in the world and how greatness is achieved in His kingdom.

Serving the least. Jesus instructs His disciples that the greatest person is the one who serves and cares for others. This includes those who seem insignificant or lowly (like a child) or who cannot return the favor. By serving the least, we are serving Jesus (Matthew 25:40). Those who seek to be the greatest will be last in God's kingdom.

Attitudes of leaders. Jesus contrasts servant leaders in the kingdom of God with the authoritarian rulers of the Gentile nations. Authoritarian leaders seek high positions and power over others for their own benefit, often to the disadvantage of others. Servant leaders encourage and support others to follow God (the highest authority) and develop others to be effective in life. Jesus teaches that the greatest leader is the greatest servant.



Life Lesson: Servant leadership is not about being on top or in control, gaining status or wealth. It's not about building a personal kingdom. Our authority as leaders comes from our service, not our positions or titles. It comes from helping others, not dominating them.

C. JESUS DEMONSTRATES KINGDOM LEADERSHIP

*Jesus washes the disciples' feet. John 13:1-17 ***

1. What does Peter's reaction reveal about foot washing?
2. Why do you think Jesus chooses washing feet as his final act with his disciples?
3. Discuss what being a servant leader should look like at your job, home, and church?

Serving with humility. At their last Passover meal, Jesus takes this significant final moment together to illustrate for His disciples what it is to be leaders in His kingdom. He takes on a job that no one wants and that makes Him look inferior (usually done by the lowest of servants). He meekly kneels before His disciples and scrubs their filthy feet. Jesus does not demand service, honor or loyalty (which he could as their leader and teacher). Instead, He offers it. He chooses to serve the competitive, proud disciples who are about to betray and deny Him. By finding His worth in His relationship with His Father, He is able to give up His rights and become the servant of all.





Life Lesson: Servant leadership is not about following a list of things to do. It involves a radical internal change in thinking and attitude that affects everything we do. Just as Jesus emptied Himself (Philippians 2:5-8), a servant has given up personal rights, is overlooked and unappreciated. This is possible by finding our worth and significance in Jesus. This kind of leader builds trust and brings healing in their relationships.

The suffering Servant. Jesus' final and greatest service was to sacrifice His life for all (Isaiah 53). This climax of God's great plan of restoration begins the new covenant. It is the promise by God to forgive sin, restore friendship and remake the lives of all who believe.



Reflection Questions

1. Are you leading the way you would want your followers to imitate?
2. Do you take on positions of leadership for your own benefit, or do you seek to develop others, helping them to succeed in life and ministry?



Application Activity

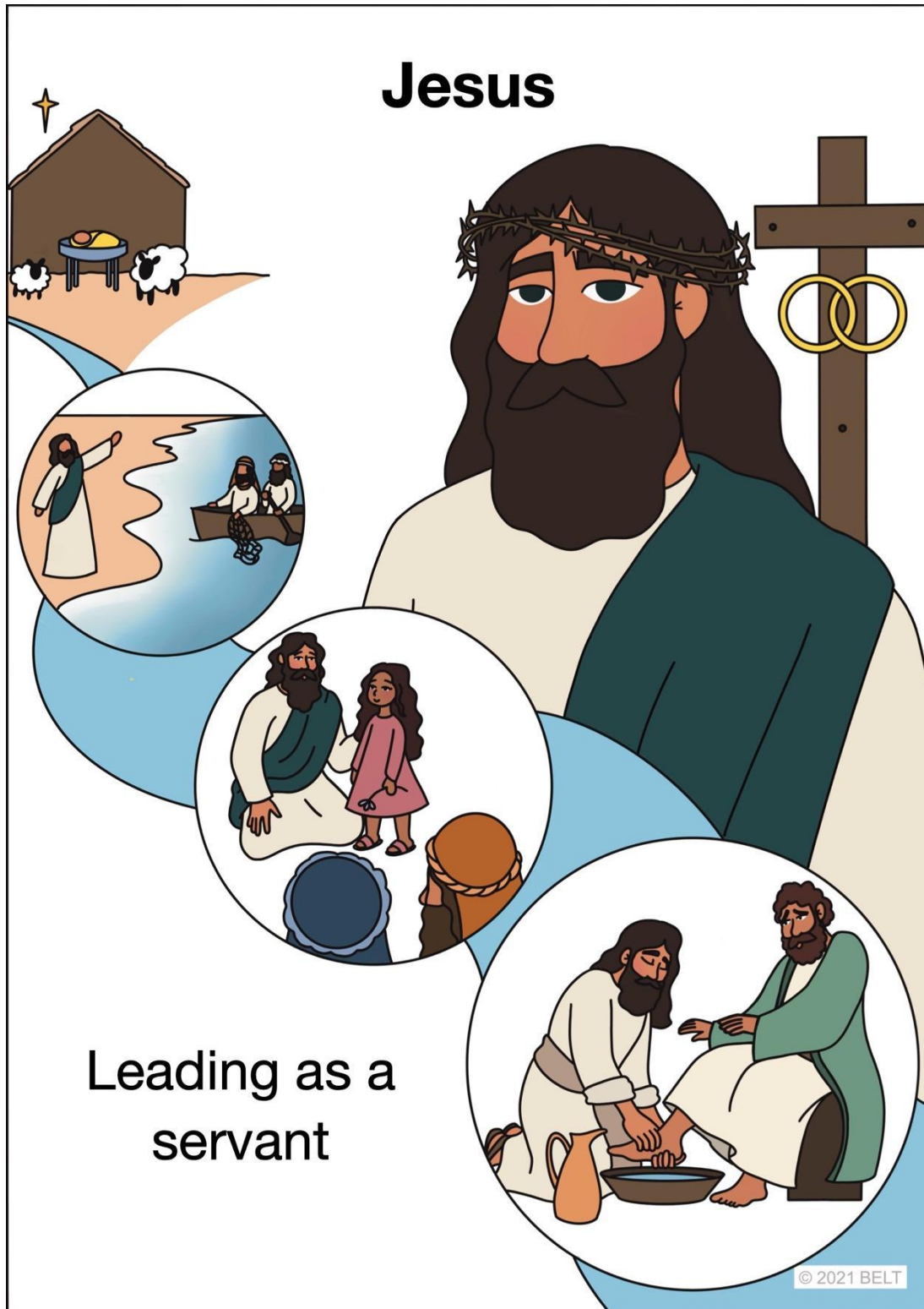
Foot washing. Ask God if there is another person in the room that He would want you to honor and serve. In a culturally appropriate way, humbly wash their feet as a way of wishing them success and God's blessing. Then pray God's favor over them.

Community service. Choose a practical community service project that others don't want to do (pick up rubbish, clean a needy person's house, etc.) Arrange to do it secretly if possible. Alternatively, take over one or two responsibilities from someone else (possibly your spouse) that you may not usually do (cooking dinner, collecting water/firewood, etc.). Do it quietly so as to bless, not seeking thanks. As you work, thank God for the opportunity to serve.



Poster Description

Jesus, the King above every king, chooses to be born into poverty and to an unknown family (background). He chooses 12 ordinary men and develops them to be like Him (left circle). He teaches them that they are not to be leaders for their own benefit, but instead to serve the least (middle circle). He washes their feet as a demonstration of how they are to humbly serve others (right circle). Jesus' final act as a leader is laying down His life, which establishes a new and better covenant (rings and cross).



PETER

Building Christian Unity

Summary

The life of Peter shows that through love, forgiveness and unity, people can be restored, churches can be strengthened and unbelievers can be drawn to Jesus. Through a unified church, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, God's plan of restoration can rapidly expand throughout the earth.



Historical Background

At His trial, Jesus is falsely accused by the Jewish religious leaders who have Him crucified by the Romans. Three days later, Jesus resurrects from the dead, and appears to His apostles for 40 days, before ascending into heaven. Ten days later, at the Jewish feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the apostles and later the new Jewish believers. The New Testament church is birthed and grows quickly and advances to other nations. The Spirit of God directs the spread of the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles. As the number of Gentile believers increases, so do questions and conflicts between them and Jewish believers.

A. THE RESTORATION OF PETER

Peter's failure. After Peter has the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus calls this fisherman into leadership of the church (Matthew 16:13-19). Peter boldly declares he is willing to die with Jesus, but at Jesus' trial, Peter denies knowing Jesus. Peter's failure brings him much shame and sorrow (Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75).

Jesus models reconciliation with a fallen leader. John 21:1-19

1. What do you think Peter is feeling after his denial of Jesus? (Compare with Judas after betraying Jesus. Matthew 27:3-5.)
2. In what ways do you see Jesus showing acceptance and confidence in Peter again?

Jesus promotes unity through forgiveness. Peter's public denial of his close friend leaves Peter with overwhelming feelings of regret (Matthew 26:75). He likely concludes his ministry is over. (Judas likewise has feelings of despair. But instead of turning to Jesus who could have forgiven him, Judas unnecessarily ends his shame by ending his life.) With abundant grace, Jesus reaches out to repentant Peter. One of the first things Jesus does after his resurrection is to send a message to his apostles, including Peter by name (Mark 16:6-7). Jesus then personally visits him over breakfast and gives him the opportunity to publicly confess his love (as many times as he had denied Jesus). Jesus and Peter are reconciled. Then Jesus restores Peter to his pastoral role in the church ("feed my sheep"). Peter goes on to play a significant unifying role as a leader in the early church.



Life Lesson: Failure isn't more powerful than grace. Just as God has forgiven us, we can reach out in compassion and mercy to a fallen leader or believer. With wisdom, restore the repentant into fellowship with the church and to their calling. (1 Peter 4:8; Colossians 3:12-14) In this way, a strong witness of unity is demonstrated to the world (John 17:19-20).

B. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES ON JEWS AND GENTILES

The birth of the Jewish church. After the resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the apostles and also given to 3000 Jews who respond to Peter's message (Acts 2:38-41). These new believers are baptized, unified, and discipled by Peter and the apostles (Acts 2:42-47).

*Peter visits Cornelius' home. Acts 10:1-48 ***

1. What is the Jewish attitude towards the Gentiles? (Acts 10:28; 11:2-3)
2. What does God reveal to Peter about the Gentiles?
3. Why is this such a significant event in God's plan of restoration?

Unity is encouraged through impartiality. The Jews consider Gentiles (non-Jews) as unclean and will not associate with them. Peter has a vision in which God reveals that he is no longer to consider Gentiles as unclean. Being directed by the Holy Spirit, Peter goes to visit Cornelius (an officer in the Roman army). Cornelius is a believer in God, but does not follow certain Jewish practices, like circumcision (Acts 10:2, 45). Peter recognizes that God loves and accepts believers from all nations (Acts 10:34-35). While Peter is speaking to these Gentiles, the Holy Spirit is poured out on them in the same way that it happened to the Jews at Pentecost. God is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and His covenant to Abraham. Through the Jewish Messiah, people of every nation would be blessed and restored. The opportunity to receive forgiveness of sins and the filling of the Holy Spirit is now available to all.



Life Lesson: As God regards all people equally without prejudice, we ought to as well. He welcomes all believers (Jews and Gentiles) to be part of His family, and to have fellowship with one another (Galatians 3:26-29). Like Peter, who later stumbles in this area (Galatians 2:11-13), we can also change and grow.

C. PETER SEEKS UNITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Peter shares at the Jerusalem Council. Acts 15:1-21 (full story - Acts 15:1-33)

1. What is the process that the church council goes through to resolve the conflict?
2. How do the recommendations of the Jerusalem council promote the spread of the gospel and unity in the early church? Acts 15:19-21
3. What are the main issues that cause division among the churches in your community? How can you promote unity?

Unity grows by resolving conflict. A dispute arises over what Jewish religious practices are required for the new Gentile believers. The conflict is resolved through discussion as the church council seeks to understand God's will and heart on the issue. Peter shares what God revealed through his experience with Cornelius. Paul testifies to what God was doing among Gentiles. Finally, James brings clarity from the Word of God. Clear simple instructions are delivered personally by some of the elders to the church (a relational process). Their goal is to build unity among the mixed congregations of Jews and Gentiles and promote the spread of the gospel among

the Jews. They encourage them to stay away from a few practices that are commonly done in the Gentile cultures and forbidden in the Law of Moses. (See also Galatians 5:6)



Life Lesson: Christian unity is based on mutual love, shared Biblical values, and together seeking to do the will of Jesus. When conflict arises, maintain unity by carefully listening, using kind words, exploring options, and working together to find God's solution.



Personal Reflection

1. How do you (and your church) treat those, including leaders, who have fallen into sin? How can you wisely and lovingly restore those who are repentant?
2. How do you see others who are different from yourself (race, beliefs)? Do you show love and respect to fellow believers of other church denominations and seek ways to build unity?



Application Activity

Share Bread Together. As members of Christ's church, ask God if there is anyone in the room that you need to be reconciled with. Go to them with bread (or whatever is appropriate). Seek restoration with them and then share the bread together. Alternatively, share the bread with someone from a different denomination or ethnic group as a demonstration of unity in God's family. Pray a blessing over them.



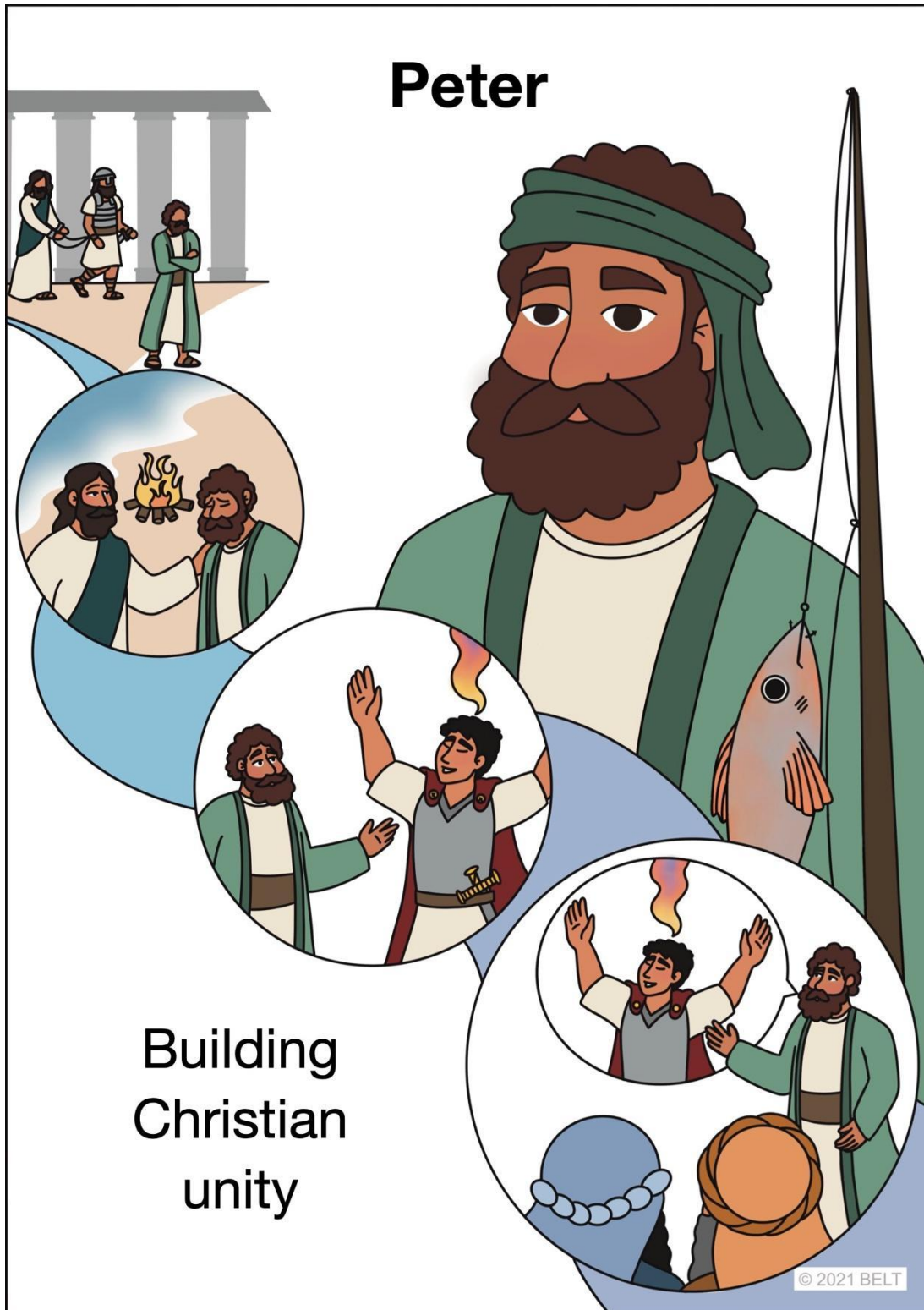
Further Study: *Unity* (Optional)

1. *The Trinity models unity.* Jesus prays that all believers would be unified with the same unity He and the Father share (perfectly united in purpose, love and understanding). In this way, the world would be drawn to Him. John 17:20-23
2. *Unity and diversity of the body of Christ.* The body of Christ has one head (leader), Jesus Christ. It is one body with many members. A variety of gifts are given to the members by the Holy Spirit. Each member of the body is needed, has equal value and should be honored regardless of their gifts or ministry. As we love and celebrate one another, we reflect Christ to the world. 1 Corinthians 12:4-27; 13:1-7 (Colossians 3:9-15)
3. *God blesses unity.* Unity results in the blessing of God and the growth of the church. Psalm 133:1-3; Acts 2:43-47; Ephesians 4:11-16



Poster Description

Peter, a fisherman, is called by Jesus to be His disciple and a fisher of men. However, at Jesus' trial, Peter publicly denies Jesus three times (background). After Jesus' resurrection, He restores repentant Peter (left circle). God directs Peter (a Jew) to visit Cornelius (a Roman). God fills Cornelius (middle circle) and his household with the Holy Spirit just as He did the Jews at Pentecost. Peter helps build unity between Jews and Gentiles by reminding the church council of what God did with Cornelius (right circle).



PAUL

Spreading God's Kingdom of Light

Summary

Paul is sent by God on three missionary journeys to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Despite persecution, suffering and great difficulties, he continues, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Where truth and the life of God take hold, God's kingdom of light begins to unfold.



Historical Background

The number of Christian believers in Jerusalem grows quickly, causing great concern for the Jewish religious leaders. They regard the followers of Jesus as a heretical religious group called "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 24:14). Stephen, one of the leaders in the early church, is stoned by these religious leaders. Paul gives approval. This begins a severe persecution of the church. Many believers scatter from Jerusalem and travel throughout Judea, Samaria and other nations. They preach the gospel wherever they go. The Holy Spirit directs the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles according to God's original covenant with Abraham to bless all nations.

A. PAUL ENCOUNTERS JESUS

Paul's background

Paul, also known by his Hebrew name, Saul (Acts 13:9), is a religious Pharisee. He eagerly imprisons and persecutes the followers of Jesus not only in Jerusalem, but also in surrounding nations. (Acts 8:1-3, 22:3-4; 26:4-5, 9-11)

Paul's salvation experience. Acts 9:1-22

1. Describe the transformation that takes place in Paul's life. What causes this significant change?
2. What is Paul being called by God to do? What is his message to be? Read also Acts 26:15-20.

Encountering Jesus transforms lives. Through a blinding light from heaven, Jesus reveals Himself to Paul while on a road to Damascus, Syria. Paul's shocking revelation that Jesus is alive and resurrected from the dead (and therefore who He claimed to be) completely changes Paul's direction in life. He is transformed from passionately persecuting believers to becoming a devoted follower himself. He is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. He immediately and powerfully proclaims Jesus as the Messiah to those in Damascus. Paul's life mission is now to preach to the unbelieving Gentiles. His urgent message is about receiving God's forgiveness and restoration by turning from sin and believing in the Lord Jesus.



Life Lesson: Salvation results in a transformed life. It involves encountering the person of Jesus, and committing to live for Him. God calls all believers to be His witnesses and join Him in the expansion of His kingdom on the earth.

B. PAUL PREACHES TO THE GENTILES

Paul is sent out

Paul, along with Barnabas, is sent out by the Holy Spirit and the believers at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). This begins Paul's first missionary journey around the region of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

Paul proclaims the truth of God at Lystra. Acts 14:8-20

1. What do you notice about Paul's methods of evangelism?
2. Have you seen these things occur in your own or others' evangelism? Share about your experiences.

Miracles and truth promote the kingdom. Paul and Barnabas arrive at the city of Lystra where many Greek gods are worshiped. A demonstration of the power of God causes a crowd to gather when a lame man is healed. Paul urges them to turn away from their false gods to the living God. This pattern of a miracle followed by the proclamation of truth is common in the life of Paul. A church is planted in Lystra, which is where Timothy is from (who joins Paul on his second missionary journey. Acts 16:1-3)



Life Lesson. God desires to demonstrate His power and love to unbelievers. This creates an opportunity to testify about Jesus.

C. PAUL'S WITNESS IN PRISON

Paul is directed westward by the Spirit

On Paul's second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit directs Paul and his companions not to go north. Then Paul receives a vision of a Macedonian Gentile asking him to come. Paul immediately obeys and goes west to Macedonia, on the continent of Europe. (Acts 16:6-12)

*The Philippian Jailer. Acts 16:16-34 ***

1. How does Paul's response to suffering influence people to trust in Jesus?
2. Share about any persecution or suffering you are facing because of your belief in Jesus. Pray with someone that your faith will be strong, and your responses honoring of the God you represent.

Suffering advances the gospel. Paul and Silas travel to Philippi, the capital city of Macedonia. There they are falsely accused and arrested, stripped and beaten severely. They are thrown into a cold, dark prison and confined in painful chains. Despite this, they begin praying and singing praises to God. The jailer witnesses their unshakeable faith and character in the midst of suffering. He also experiences the power of God through the earthquake. These lead to his desire to know and follow their God. Paul shares the gospel with him and he and all his family are saved.



Life Lesson. The kingdom of light advances as believers walk in Christ's character and peace in times of persecution and suffering.

Paul's final journey to Rome

After Paul's third missionary journey, he travels to Jerusalem. There the Jewish religious leaders try to kill him. Paul is arrested. As a Roman citizen, Paul appeals to be tried before the Roman emperor (Acts 25:1-12). So Paul is sent to Rome where he spends two years awaiting his trial and shares about Jesus to all who visit him (Acts 28:30-31). Historians believe Paul is killed by the Roman Emperor Nero during a period of severe Christian persecution in Rome (along with the apostle Peter, who is believed to be crucified upside down.)

God will make all things new

Just like God partners with ordinary, devoted people like Paul (and Abraham, Deborah, etc.) in extraordinary ways, so He wants to partner with each one of us. He wants to use us to see his kingdom of light multiplied in all the earth, including in the darkest and hardest of places (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20). At the end of the ages, Jesus will come to earth a second time to complete His plan of restoration launched when the earth became spoiled and broken. Sin and death will no longer stain God's creation. There will be no more sickness and pain, poverty and injustice. God Himself will dwell among His people and He will once again make all things right, whole and beautiful. (Revelation 21:1-7)



Reflection Questions

1. In what ways have you seen God transforming your life since you were saved?
2. What is God calling you to do to partner with Him to spread the kingdom of light in your community and nation?



Application Activity

Pray over a map of the world. Ask God for His power and love to make this spoiled and broken world beautiful again. Pray for His will to be done in your community just as it is done in heaven. Speak out your willingness to be used by God to help bring this about.



What's Next?

Consider how to encourage each other to continue growing in godly character and leadership. Discuss ways to regularly pray together and partner with God to see His plan of restoration realized in your community.



Poster Description

While Paul is on his way to persecute Christians (background of Stephen being stoned), he meets the resurrected Jesus and is dramatically saved (left circle). God calls Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He goes on three missionary journeys where he starts many churches (large image). On his first journey, he heals a lame man and testifies of the living God (middle circle). On his second journey, he is unjustly beaten and thrown into jail. Despite this, Paul sings praises to God and sees the jailor saved (right circle).

