

Vol. 126 | No. 1

THE YOUNG PEOPLE-ADULT QUARTERLY
International Church School Lessons for Christian Teaching
(Ages 18 and up)

First Quarter
September, October, November– 2024

WORSHIP

in the Covenant Community

STUDIES IN
Genesis, Exodus, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings
2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms, John



Dr. Mozella Mitchell and Rev. Dr. Charlean B. Mapson – Writers
Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II, D.Min., J.D. – Editor
Department of Church School Literature
Rev. Patrick Barrett, II, M.Div. – General Secretary
Christian Education Department

THE LORD'S PRAYER

- ⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is
in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the
glory, for ever. Amen."

Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under the Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: The third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy, catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting.

Amen.

**catholic means universal*



September, October, November 2024-2025
WORSHIP PROGRAM

MUSICAL PRELUDE

September: "El Shaddai," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #63, or "Excellent Is Your Name," by Chicago Mass Choir, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f-9HjSckiOck>.

October: "How Great Thou Art," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #47, or "Oh, Lord How Excellent Is Thy Name," by River of Life Choir, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GYLI0u3s8I>.

November: "Lord, I Hear of Showers of Blessings," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #464, or "Grateful," by Hezekiah Walker, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEOW-kQyz6A>.

CALL TO WORSHIP

September: Led by the Sunday School Superintendent (1st Sunday); a child (2nd Sunday); Christian Education Director (3rd Sunday); a missionary (4th Sunday); and a young adult (5th Sunday).

Leader: "Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!" (Psalm 150:1 NRSV)

All: "Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!" (Psalm 150:2 NRSV)

October: Led by the pastor or a minister (1st Sunday); a senior (2nd Sunday); a lay person (3rd Sunday); and a youth (4th Sunday).

Leader: "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!"
(Psalm 150:3 NRSV)

All: "***Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!***" (Psalm 150:4 NRSV)

November: Led by a girl (1st Sunday); a boy (2nd Sunday); a woman (3rd Sunday); and a man (4th Sunday).

Leader: "Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!" (Psalm 150:5 NRSV)

All: "***Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!***"
(Psalm 150:6 NRSV)

CHORAL INVOCATION

(Sung corporately)

"He Is Lord," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #689)

MORNING HYMN

September: "This Is the Day," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #42)

October: "To God Be the Glory," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #50)

November: "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #243)

RESPONSIVE READING

1 Chronicles 16:23-31 NLT

Leader: Let the whole earth sing to the Lord! Each day proclaim the good news that he saves.

People: Publish his glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things he does.

Leader: Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be feared above all gods. The gods of other nations are mere idols, but the Lord made the heavens!

People: Honor and majesty surround him; strength and joy fill his dwelling. O nations of the world, recognize the Lord, recognize that the Lord is glorious and strong.

Leader: Give to the Lord the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come into his presence. Worship the Lord in all his holy splendor.

All: Let all the earth tremble before him. The world stands firm and cannot be shaken. Let the heavens be glad, and the earth rejoice! Tell the nations, "The Lord reigns!"

RALLY SONG

"Praise Him," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtvBvVLU2v8>,
by Anthony Brown & Fellowship Chorale.

STUDY PERIOD

Learners study the lessons in their classes.

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

Class members will commit and dedicate themselves to a pattern of worship that praises God for God's goodness and mercy in both good and challenging times.

SUNDAY SCHOOL BENEDICTION

Sunday school is over for another day. Hear us, Heavenly Father, as to Thee we pray. Through the week be with us in our work and play; Make us kind and loving, help us to obey.

Amen.

ADULT UNIT I: Leaders Set Worship Example
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Abram Builds an Altar at Mamre
ADULT TOPIC: Marking Transitions

LESSON 1

DATE: September 1, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Philippians 4:10-19

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12-13

PRINT PASSAGE: Genesis 13:8-18

Home Daily Bible Reading

Aug. 26	M	2 Corinthians 1:16-24	God's Promises Are Always "Yes"
Aug. 27	T	Genesis 12:1-9	A New Life of Obedience
Aug. 28	W	Genesis 12:10-20	Fear Not Faith
Aug. 29	Th	Philippians 4:10-19	God Will Fully Satisfy Your Needs
Aug. 30	F	Colossians 2:6-12	Walk in Christ with Thanksgiving
Aug. 31	Sa	Psalms 16	God Gives a Goodly Heritage
Sept. 1	Su	Genesis 13:8-18	Gratefulness for God's Promises

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” - #29 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Genesis 13:8-18 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. ⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” ¹⁰ And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) ¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. ¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. ¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

14 The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." 18 So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

Affirmation— We desire the spiritual maturity that develops through acknowledging God's activity in our lives. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

The lessons of this quarter are a study of worship practices offered as a grateful response to the covenantal relationship God initiates, first with Abraham, and later with the people of Israel. The patterns of worship reflect the gamut of community life, from praising God's goodness and mercy to calling on God for help in times of crisis.

Unit 1, "Leaders Set Worship Example," begins with the example of (Abram) Abraham, who built altars to mark those occasions on which God called him to greater faithfulness. Lesson 2 reveals Solomon's worshipful awareness of people's tendency to sin. Lesson 3 shows us Hezekiah's prayerful realization of what's most important: the Lord alone is God. Lesson 4 demonstrates the importance of spiritual leadership, as evidenced through Josiah's call to bring back the people to the right worship as prescribed in the "book of the covenant."

Throughout life, threshold opportunities arise that determine our future. How do we honor such opportunities with solemnity and gratefulness? Abram built altars to mark those occasions on which God called him to greater faithfulness.

Break into small groups and think about and discuss the following questions and issues: 1.) Share with one another how you may have experienced threshold moments or events either individually through some sort of encounter or as a part of a family occurrence. Describe what happened and the impact it had on you and others immediately and in later life. Were there both positive and adverse effects? Explain. 2.) Do interpersonal conflicts initiate a threshold event? If so, how might reconciliation take place with those in such conflict? How might the experience become a memorable one through the actions and responses of those involved? 3.) Can you recall a time when everyone in the family/community/church shared a commitment to the peaceful resolution of a dispute? If so, share some of the details and sense of relief. 4.) Can you share an occasion wherein a group memorializes the threshold events that resulted in resolution?

Genesis 13:8-13: Three times in Genesis, God's statement of promise to Abraham follows a separation. In 12:1-9, Abraham, separated from his home (11:31; 12:1), traveled the land of Canaan, received it as a promise, and built an altar in response to God's promise. Similarly, after Lot separated to Sodom (13:9, 11, 14), Abraham traveled the land of Canaan, received it a second time as a promise, and built an altar in response. Finally, in Genesis 22, Abraham showed his willingness to be separated from his son Isaac on an altar, then received the promise a third time. Living and roaming on the land was common in the ancient Near East. The provision for the health of Abram and Lot's herds determined their prospects for survival. Given the scarcity of grazing land and water sources, tempers were short. There were limits as to the size of herds that the land could support. In deferring to Lot, Abraham is on the verge of giving away the Promised Land. But Lot "chose" to go "east." Abraham remained in the land, securing God's promise. Lot became the father of the Ammonites and the Moabites (19:37-38), who proved to be obstacles to Israel's faithfulness (Deuteronomy 23:3-6; Ezra 9:1). Is there some symbolism relating to moving toward the east? The movement away from God in Genesis is toward the east (3:24; 4:16; possibly 11:2), perhaps a rhetorical device by the exilic editors of Genesis. Babylonian exile was also to the east. Note the subtle foreshadowing of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:22). Lot's choice of a land "toward Zoar," "toward the east" forebodes disaster. The ties between chapter 13 and the destruction of Sodom (Chapter 19) can be seen in verse 10b and verses 12b-13. Interestingly, the New Testament describes Lot as "a righteous man" (2 Peter 2:7-8).

Genesis 13:14-18: An altar is a structure on which offerings are made to a god. The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeah* ("to slaughter"); Greek *thυσιαστήριον* ("a place of sacrifice"). Altars are places of exchange, communication, and influence (see Noah and Elijah). In the patriarchal period, altars were markers of place, commemorating an encounter with God (Genesis 12:7), or physical signs of habitation. The altar built by Abraham near Hebron was located relatively close to those mentioned in 12:6-8, in what would later be the central regions of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Mamre refers to an Amorite who resided near Hebron (Genesis 14:13, 24). He owned the place known as "the oaks of Mamre the Amorite" (14:13). Abraham lived in the town or district known as Mamre, which was part of Hebron (13:18; 18:1). The *ESV Reformation Study Bible* has interesting insight into the fulfillment of the Promised Land implicated in the verse 15: "The promises of land were fulfilled several times but never consummated. God fulfilled the promise through Joshua (Josh. 21:43-45), but not completely (Josh. 13:1-7); even more so through David and Solomon (1 Kin. 4:20-25; Neh. 9:8), but still not completely (Ps. 95:11; Heb. 4:6-8; 11:39, 40). As Israel's Exodus from Egypt through the Passover (Ex. 12:1) is a type of the church's exodus from the condemned world through Christ (1 Cor. 5:7; 10:1-4), so also old Israel's life in the land is a type of New Israel's life in Christ. Both are a gift (15:7, 18; Deut.

1:8; Rom. 6:23), and are received by faith (Num. 14:26–44; Josh. 7 and John 3:16). Both uniquely possess the blessed presence, life, and rest of God (Ex. 23:20–31; Deut. 11:12; 12:9,10; 28:1–14; John 1:51; 14:9; Matt. 11:28), and demand persevering faith (Deut. 28:15–19; Heb. 6). The land promises are consummated forever in the new heaven and new earth (Heb. 11:39, 40; Rev. 21:1–22:6).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Respond appropriately to the following as requested: 1.) Explore the spiritual maturity of marking time and space as essential reminders of God-filled moments. Give some specific examples. 2.) Name a significant God-moment you have experienced and build an altar of remembrance and gratitude to God. Explain the significance to the group. 3.) Using watercolors or pastels, invite the learners to paint/draw how they feel led to greater faithfulness during the reading/Bible study. 4.) Explore the spiritual dimensions of conflict resolution. Give an example for the group to consider. 5.) Every morning, face the rising sun in the east, and thank God for the time and space you've been given. How does this make you feel?

iTHINK: (5–7 min.)

1. Explore the concept of liminality, or threshold events, and how God uses it to shape the lives of believers.
2. Share stories of property disputes that resulted in bringing families closer (or not). What was most helpful, or disruptive, to the families in settling the dispute?
3. Offer situations in which learners analyze conflicted situations and offer resolutions.
4. Review the covenant with Abraham and identify the threats to God's promises to Abraham.
5. Review the history of altars in the Middle East and their meanings for worship. See britannica.com/topic/altar.
6. Consider the meaning of altars in your church's faith tradition. When has the altar held importance in your memory of a particular event (baptism, marriage, conversion, etc.)?

KEY VERSE: So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord. Genesis 13:18



ADULT UNIT I: Leaders Set Worship Example
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Solomon Dedicates the Temple
ADULT TOPIC: Our House Is a Very Fine House

LESSON 2
DATE: September 8, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 34:11-22
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Kings 8:22-53
PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a
(end with "committed against you")

Home Daily Bible Reading

Sept. 2	M	Romans 8:18-28	<i>Sighs Too Deep for Words</i>
Sept. 3	T	Psalm 34:11-22	<i>God Hears Our Cry for Help</i>
Sept. 4	W	Nehemiah 12:27-30, 44-47	<i>Celebrate with Rejoicing, Thanksgiving, Singing</i>
Sept. 5	Th	2 Chronicles 7:12-22	<i>Bring Your Requests Before God</i>
Sept. 6	F	Luke 11:1-13	<i>Lord, Teach Us to Pray</i>
Sept. 7	Sa	1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30, 37-43	<i>God the Promise Keeper</i>
Sept. 8	Su	1 Kings 8:44-53	<i>Hear Our Plea and Grant Compassion</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “The Church’s One Foundation” - #304 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – 1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39, 46, 48-50a (end with “committed against you”) (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Solomon’s Prayer of Dedication

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, ²³ and said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart; ²⁴ you have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day.

³⁷ “If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence or blight or mil-

dew or locust or caterpillar, if their enemy besieges them in the land at their gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, ³⁸ whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, ³⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind),

⁴⁶ “If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near,

⁴⁸ if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, ⁴⁹ then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause ⁵⁰ and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you,

Affirmation – We will find confidence in God’s presence in favorable and unfavorable life circumstances. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Great events cause people to anticipate a better future. How can we keep a proper perspective during and after such events? At the worship-dedication of the Temple, Solomon called on God to hear and heed the Israelites’ future prayers. Discuss your recollections of the final completion of significant projects that have taken long years to finish—for which the community has longed with much anticipation. What need was there for celebration, and what kind of celebration and commemoration was called for and chosen for the occasion? You may take school buildings, hospitals, college campuses, roads, hotels, office buildings, sports stadiums, various public buildings as examples. What were the significant sacrifices made to accomplish these goals? What hopes were inspired in the people? How do people regard the completed projects in their ongoing lives and existence and the importance of the accomplishment as a legacy for future generations?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

1 Kings 8:22-24, 37-39: The Temple has been built, and the ark of the covenant placed in the Holy of Holies (“inner sanctuary,” v. 6). “A cloud filled the house of the Lord” (v. 10), a sign of God’s presence (v. 11). Solomon prays, praising God for covenant faithfulness through the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 4:39; 7:9) and connecting it to the dynastic promise given to David

(2 Samuel 7:11b-16). Some indications are that additions were made during the exile such as, for instance: (1) that God is present beyond the temple gave comfort to the exiles. Many preexilic Jews held that God's only earthly abode is the temple (Jeremiah 7:1ff.); (2) Verse 30: "pray toward this place." See also verses 34b, 35, 43-44, 48. (See also Daniel 6:11.); (3) The universalist attitude behind this prayer is typical of exilic and postexilic times. (See also Isaiah 40-55; Jonah; Tobit 13:6-11; Zechariah 8:18ff.) Solomon speaks in prayer on behalf of these later exiles in vv. 47-53. (See also Jeremiah 29:5-8.) Note the repeated reference of the verb "to pray" and the noun "prayer," plus associated pleas: crying to God, asking God to hear their prayers and forgive their sins. Israel believed that tragedy was a sign of God's anger toward Israel. See in verse 35 a reference to a terrible drought; in verse 37, famine and of all kinds of pestilences. By confessing their sin and praising God in the temple, sinners can hope to satisfy or lessen God's wrath and bring an end to their punishment (v. 33). (See also Joshua 7:19; Ezra 10:7-19.) The normal position for public prayer was to stand and to stretch out the hands (1 Kings 8:22; see also Psalm 134:2; 1 Timothy 2:8). Solomon also kneeled, facing the altar before standing to bless the people (1 Kings 8:54-55). The prayer includes seven petitions asking the Lord to hear his people when they pray toward the temple: (1) when they sin against a neighbor (vv. 31-32); (2) when they suffer defeat (vv. 33-34); (3) when there is drought (vv. 35-36); (4) when there is famine (vv. 37-40); (5) when they go to battle (vv. 44-45); (6) when the foreigner prays toward the temple (vv. 41-43); and (7) that the Lord will hear the Lord's exiled people and grant them compassion when they repent and pray toward the temple (vv. 46-53).



1 Kings 8: 46, 48-50a (end with "committed against you"): Note that Solomon's prayer urges repentance in the hope of God's forgiveness and the compassion of their captors. There is no explicit promise of restoration or the preservation of the Davidic dynasty. That restoration might come is in the reminder of God's liberation of the people from Egypt. "When Solomon's prayer is finished, he blesses the people of Israel, reminds them of God's faithfulness and holiness, and admonishes them to have a loyal heart towards God. They must always walk with Him in obedience in the days ahead, just as they feel

inclined to do now.... The scale of the worship that surrounds the dedication of the temple in making the peace offerings is amazing.... Following a great feast for all Israel, the people go away, blessing Solomon and grateful that God has granted both David and them such good and wonderful blessings" (*The Bible Panorama*). "The sum of Solomon's religious accomplishments, then, resulted in the centralization of Israelite worship. At least in theory, the various shrines situated throughout the land were now to disappear, and the temple was to serve as the focal point of all Israelite religious practices. With such a development, however, came the possibility of a major problem—a permanent structure frequently leads to a permanent institution. Similarly, that structure and institution frequently replace the God they were originally intended to serve. [In other words, the institution can become an idol in itself.] When the joy of this remarkable occasion fades, the likes of Jeremiah and others will echo this concern (Jer 7:4). But in the meantime, Solomon is surely a religious example" (*The Asbury Bible Commentary*).

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Discuss what different postures for prayer may signify: standing with arms outstretched and palms up or kneeling with your head uplifted or any others positions, such as lying prostrate. How would you clean your home, imagining that you were preparing the temple for God's arrival? Identify ways to prepare your temple (heart) for worship. Reflect on the benefits you have gained from congregational worship. How does it differ from individual, private worship? How would you incorporate *blessing prayers* into such activities as leaving for school, going to the grocery store, or washing the car?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Offer an architectural or archaeological analysis of a drawing or blueprint for Solomon's Temple.
2. Prepare a brief presentation on the biblical history and theology of the temple in Jerusalem.
3. Prepare an infographic poster that breaks down Solomon's prayer structure and movement at the temple's dedication.
4. Using index cards, ask learners to paraphrase the seven petitions and discuss how the paraphrases deepen a connection to Solomon's experience of worship.
5. Invite learners to name those in the congregation who have claimed God's past faithfulness as an assurance of God's continuing favor.
6. Discuss the purpose of confessing sin during the worship service. Bring samples of confessional prayers for review.

KEY VERSES: "Whatever prayer, whatever plea there is from any individual or from all your people Israel, all knowing the afflictions of their own hearts so that they stretch out their hands toward this house; then hear in heaven your dwelling place." 1 Kings 8:38-39a

ADULT UNIT I: Leaders Set Worship Example
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Hezekiah's Prayer
ADULT TOPIC: Is It Inevitable?

LESSON 3

DATE: September 15, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 8:29-39
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 19:1-34
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31

Home Daily Bible Reading

Sept. 9	M	Romans 8:29-39	<i>We Are More than Conquerors through Christ</i>
Sept. 10	T	2 Corinthians 4:8-18	<i>Do Not Lose Heart</i>
Sept. 11	W	Psalms 69:1-15	<i>God Protects Me</i>
Sept. 12	Th	Psalms 69:16-21, 29-36	<i>The Lord Hears the Needy</i>
Sept. 13	F	2 Thessalonians 3:1-5	<i>God Will Strengthen and Guard You</i>
Sept. 14	Sa	2 Kings 19:14-19	<i>A Humble Prayer for Help</i>
Sept. 15	Su	2 Kings 19:20-31	<i>God Is a Powerful Defender</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “O for a Faith that Will Not Shrink” - #486 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymn

Declaration – 2 Kings 19:14-20, 29-31 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

Hezekiah's Prayer

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord. ¹⁵ And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: “O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ Incline your ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. ¹⁷ Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands ¹⁸ and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they were destroyed. ¹⁹ So now, O Lord our God, save

us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone.”

Isaiah Prophecies Sennacherib’s Fall

²⁰ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

²⁹ “And this shall be the sign for you: this year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs of the same. Then in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. ³⁰ And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. ³¹ For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of the Lord will do this.

Affirmation – We will value prayer in the face of crisis and always. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Disaster seems inevitable when a chain of events points to an inescapable outcome. What can people do when all seems lost? In a time of crisis, Hezekiah turned to worshipful prayer and was heard. Discuss with the group how we normally react in times of crisis. Do we remain calm, slow down and center ourselves? Or, do we get all upset, panic in the face of such? What do leaders tend to do to help calm our fears and find signs of hope in moving forward? What particular leaders have you known to act wisely and guide the people in conquering fears and facing up to such situations or crisis?



EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

2 Kings 19:14-20: Hezekiah went to the temple to pray, spreading Sennacherib’s letter before the Lord (2 Kings 19:14ff.). In his prayer, he claims that



Yahweh alone is God over the kingdoms of the earth. The Lord is not a national deity like the gods of the peoples around them. Yahweh is supreme over all nations as the one and only Creator (Psalm 47:2-9). Probably facing the ark of the covenant (representing the throne of God), Hezekiah models the type of kingship that the Lord intended for his people, namely, as vice-regent for Yahweh, the true King. He appeals to Yahweh to deliver Jerusalem so that Yahweh's glory will be seen among the nations (1 Kings 8:42; 1 Samuel 17:46), which was Yahweh's purpose in establishing Israel (2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 67:1-2; cf. Isaiah 26:18). Hezekiah reminds Yahweh of that purpose. Earlier, in Exodus 32, Moses persuades Yahweh to forgo destroying Israel using a similar tactic. Yahweh responds to Hezekiah's prayer through the prophet Isaiah, who announces the certain defeat of the Assyrian army and restoration of the land of Judah.



2 Kings 19:29-31: It is clear that Yahweh will not allow others to profane his

name or destroy his people (Isaiah 26:11; 59:17). The same phrase occurs elsewhere only with the promise to establish David's son on the throne forever (Isaiah 9:7). It will take two years for life to return to normal after the invasion and siege (v. 29). God will ultimately restore a remnant when the promised Messiah rules (Isaiah 10:21; 11:12-16; Zechariah 12:10-14:9). Notice the effectiveness of Isaiah as a prophet in assisting Hezekiah. His message to Hezekiah is that God Himself has spoken. He assures Hezekiah that the blasphemy

of Sennacherib, who attributes his successes to his own strength and power, will be repaid; he predicts Sennacherib's downfall and makes Hezekiah aware of the good God has in store for His people. "There will be no attack on Jerusalem and the Lord will defend it for His own sake, and for David's sake. Verses 35–37: God's angel intervenes to kill 185,000 Assyrians. Sennacherib returns home. In his idol temple, he is murdered by two of his own sons. Another of his sons takes his place as king" (*The Bible Panorama*).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss what you see as possible outcomes for the near future in religious, political, or social areas of our life. Does this fill you with anxiety or hope? Give reasons for your answer. Is there any way to see that any negative outcomes can or will be reversed? Write a letter expressing appreciation to a leader for their hopeful approach to leading. Be specific about how their approach impacts you. Tell her/him how you saw God's hand in guiding him/her.

Write a date three years from today at the top of a sheet of paper. Underneath the date, write about your personal desires and hopes for the world and for the future. State how you think God will be at work in bringing those hopes and desires to fruition. Share with the group.

Commit to memory the chorus, "Lord of all to thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise" ("For the Beauty of the Earth") and sing or hum it when you face a crisis or difficult decision or relationship. How do you think this praise will be helpful to anyone facing difficulties?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Present a character study of King Hezekiah.
2. Review the events that led up to Hezekiah's prayer.
3. Debate the idea of changing God's mind. What biblical evidence suggests that changing God's mind is possible and/or that God does not change?
4. Discuss personal experiences that have called for the most courage and faith. How did you respond at the time?
5. Discuss the fragility of both human and economic conditions during a crisis and why those conditions should not be a reason for despair for God's people.
6. Give a brief presentation on the development of Israel's view of Yahweh, from a regional deity akin to the gods of neighboring peoples to the cosmic perspective, "you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth" (v. 15).

KEY VERSE: "So now, O Lord our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O Lord, are God alone." 2 Kings 19:19

ADULT UNIT I: Leaders Set Worship Example
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Josiah Celebrates Passover
ADULT TOPIC: Claiming the Treasures of the Past

LESSON 4

DATE: September 22, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:19

PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

Home Daily Bible Reading

Sept. 16 M	1 Corinthians 5	Abstain from Immorality
Sept. 17 T	Revelation 5:6-14	Worthy Is the Lamb!
Sept. 18 W	2 Chron 34:8, 14-27	God Forgives Those Who Repent
Sept. 19 Th	Psalms 85	Restore Us Again, O God
Sept. 20 F	Ephesians 5:3-14	Living in the Light of Christ
Sept. 21 Sa	Exodus 12:3-17	A Day of Celebration
Sept. 22 Su	2 Chron 35:1-6, 16-19	Sanctify Yourselves

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Let Us Break Bread Together” - #338 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively)

Josiah Keeps the Passover

¹ Josiah kept a Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ² He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the Lord. ³ And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the Lord, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. You need not carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. ⁴ Prepare yourselves according to your fathers’ houses by your divisions, as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son. ⁵ And stand in the Holy Place according to the groupings of the fathers’ houses of your brothers the lay people, and according to the division of the Levites by fathers’ household. ⁶ And slaughter the Passover lamb, and consecrate yourselves, and

prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the Lord by Moses.”

16 So all the service of the Lord was prepared that day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, according to the command of King Josiah. **17** And the people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. **18** No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. **19** In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.

Affirmation – We will be alert for interior distractions that compromise obedience to God. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Promises and commitments can become neglected over time as their importance is forgotten and otherwise not communicated. How can we keep our commitments? King Josiah called on his people to celebrate Passover as an act of renewed obedience to worship as prescribed in God’s covenant. Break into small groups and discuss the following questions and issues: 1.) What is the value of expression or performance of ritual remembrances for the growth and development of our children as well as for maintaining and solidifying our own character? 2.) Can you think of specific consequences of our having let time-honored rituals fade from practice? Discuss this with the group. 3.) Explain how celebrating special times and places contributes to a renewal of commitment to something larger than ourselves. What are some specific ex-

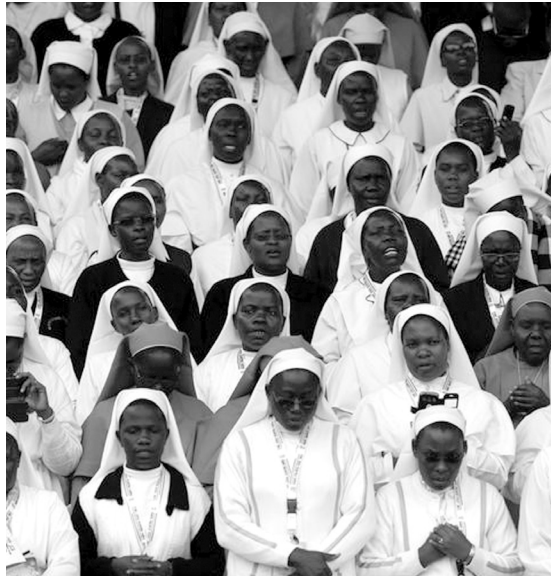


amples of this? 4.) Does renewing the celebrations of the past enable us to look to the future with hope? Explain your answer.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

2 Chronicles 35:1-6: “The Passover celebrated in Josiah’s eighteenth year is mentioned briefly in 2 Kings 22-23; but described here in detail. Like Hezekiah before him, Josiah enthusiastically observed this national celebration in the temple at Jerusalem (see also Ezra 6:19–22)” (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*). Josiah is very young when he begins his reign, following the assassination of Amon (2 Chronicles 33:24). Josiah reigned for 31 years (641/40 to 609 B.C.). During this time, Judah began to experience newfound freedom, which likely played a role in the vast array of reforms enacted by Josiah. His changes took place in three periods: his 8th year (ca. 633 B.C.; 34:3); his 12th year (ca. 629 B.C.; 34:3); and his 18th year (ca. 623 B.C.; 34:8). The prophetic ministries of Zephaniah and Jeremiah support Josiah’s reforms. Both accounts of Josiah’s reign (2 Kings 22–23; 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19) deal with three different aspects of his reform: (1) the removal of foreign religions (Kings depicts it in great detail, while Chronicles summarizes it); (2) the discovery of the Book of the Law and the covenant renewal that followed (the two histories are quite similar); and (3) the celebration of Passover (the account is greatly expanded in 2 Chronicles 35:1-19, while only alluded to in 2 Kings 23:21-23).

2 Chronicles 35:16-19: It is said of Josiah’s Passover, “No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel” (2 Chronicles 35:18). Instead of in “the days of the judges” (2 Kings 23:22), Chronicles highlights the importance of the prophets. The powerful in society, the king, his leaders, and particular powerful Levites (2 Chronicles 35:7-9) provided the thousands of animals necessary for the sacrifice and feast. The peasants ate from the bounty of the king and the temple. As 2 Chronicles was written or compiled as the Babylonian Exile was ending, the Jews began to return to Jerusalem without a Davidic king or Solomon’s Temple. The book thus reminds the Jews that God’s people are defined by faithful worship of the one true God. The book concludes with God’s faithful provision through Cyrus, the king of Persia. He organized the return of the exiles



to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord. "Josiah's acts and God-given goodness are a biblical testimony to what great effects of blessing can come from the small beginning of an eight-year-old child seeking God and growing in grace. God influences a whole nation and many other people through him" (*Bible Panorama*).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and share responses to following issues and questions: 1.) Name the idols that have been crowding God out of your life. How can you tear down those idols to draw closer to God? 2.) Reflect on how long the people of Israel had neglected to celebrate the Passover. How can you remember to celebrate with gratitude all that God has done for you? 3.) Name a ritual celebration that revitalizes your faith and the emotional connection you have with that celebration. 4.) Covenant with a prayer partner to create a plan to renew/revive neglected spiritual practices. 5.) Pray for your church leaders for their commitment to renewing covenants with God and leading the congregation in obedient worship. 6.) Send a note to the recently baptized, confirmed, and ordained person in your congregation, offering your support and pledging your prayers.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Compare the renewals of the Passover celebration under Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30:1-26) and Josiah (2 Chronicles 35:1-19). List the distractions and sinful practices that made renewal necessary. Then suggest parallels from our lives that can compromise our obedience.
2. Review the reason for the Passover's institution in the Exodus from Egypt. Then compare the two accounts of Josiah's Passover celebration (here and in 2 Kings 23) to evaluate his attempt at renewing the observance of this ritual among God's people.
3. Contrast two approaches to the Passover, the early simple family feast and Josiah's centralized religious festival, which was to become the central feast of the year. How did both contribute to helping the people remember God's covenant?
4. Watch "Chronicles" at bibleproject.com and place the themes of Josiah's reign in the broader context of the literary/historical goals of 1 and 2 Chronicles.
5. Invite a costumed actor to portray Josiah and offer a monologue imagining his emotional response to the recovery of Passover.
6. List spiritual rituals and practices that tend to get neglected or overlooked today. Choose one and plan a group celebration to revitalize it.

KEY VERSE: Josiah kept a passover to the Lord in Jerusalem; they slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2 Chronicles 35:1



ADULT UNIT II: Songs of the Old Testament
**ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Moses and Miriam Lead the People
in Praise**
ADULT TOPIC: Time to Party!

LESSON 5
DATE: September 29, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 104:1-9
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Exodus 14:21-31; 15:1-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21

Home Daily Bible Reading

Sept. 23	M	Isaiah 42:13-17	God Goes Forth like a Warrior
Sept. 24	T	James 5:7-11	Be Patient, the Lord Is Coming
Sept. 25	W	1 Peter 3:18-22	Saved through Water
Sept. 26	Th	Exodus 14:21-31	Victory at the Sea
Sept. 27	F	Psalm 104:1-9	God Protects Creation
Sept. 28	Sa	Psalm 147:1-12	Our Worship Gives God Joy
Sept. 29	Su	Exodus 15:1-13, 20-21	Sing of God's Glorious Triumph

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “Praise Him! Praise Him!”-#268 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Exodus 15:1-3, 11-13, 17-18, 20-21 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

¹ Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. ² The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. ³ The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name.

¹¹ “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? ¹² You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. ¹³ “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

¹⁷ You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the

place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. ¹⁸ The Lord will reign forever and ever.”

²⁰ Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. ²¹ And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Affirmation— We will keep faith whether facing a difficult situation or celebrating victory. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Unit II, “Songs of the Old Testament,” looks at various songs Israel used in worship and prayer. While we may not know the melody of their songs, we can get a sense of the mood embedded in the lyrics and what they felt in the presence of God’s power and goodness. Lesson 5 notes the deliverance of Israel from Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and the song Miriam led in response. Lesson 6 considers Psalm 51, usually regarded as David’s prayer of confession following his adultery with Bathsheba and the slaying of her husband Uriah in battle; children hear the background story of the death of Uriah. In Lesson 7, a plea for deliverance is considered through Psalm 22. At the same time, children study the rescue of Daniel’s friends at a time when they might have prayed this psalm. Lesson 8 takes us to the first part of Isaiah 25, a song of praise for deliverance from oppression; children hear about Daniel’s miraculous rescue from a den of lions. The final session of the unit (Lesson 9) looks at Psalm 62, a song of trust in God.

People enjoy finding opportunities to celebrate. What ways can we celebrate the victories in our lives? Moses and Miriam led the people with praises in song for God’s victory in the lives of the Israelites. Discuss the following issues and questions: 1. How much do we appreciate and rely on the leadership of women to express emotions appropriate to an occasion? 2. What are some momentous times in which we sing and even dance together for joy? How appropriate is such a celebration? Do we actually celebrate the blessings and gifts we receive enough? 3. What life-changing events are worthy of our celebrations together?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Exodus 15:1-3, 11-12: The “Song at the Sea” (Exodus 15:1-18) celebrates Yahweh’s victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea and looks to the future establishment of God’s sanctuary on the earth. Israel defeated the named nations (vv. 14-15) hundreds of years later, suggesting that the final form of the song was preserved at the time of David or Solomon. Exodus 15 shows close affinity with a sacred poem discovered at Ugarit in Syria. Some commentators

suggest that the refrain, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously” was sung in some form during Israel’s years of bondage in Egypt. Liberation theology teaches us that songs of faith sung during slavery reach new heights of purpose and praise to God when sung by a free people. Consider applications in contemporary contexts where people, especially those of African descent, once enslaved, sing songs of liberation and freedom. Such is the legacy of Black spirituals (example: “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”). Since tambourines are immediately available to the participants as they celebrate, the Hebrews likely crafted them in bondage. The many generations of oppression had not destroyed their creative impulse, so the women danced, sang, and played their instruments to praise God for their deliverance. Verses 8-10 (not in our text today) reflect an ancient myth in which the gods battle the waters. Water, especially the sea, was considered a hostile power (See Psalms 77:16-19; 114:3-6; Habakkuk 3:8.) As in Psalm 107:25-27, a storm lifts high mountains of water. Today, during storms and especially hurricanes, we have great fear of storm surge where there are bodies of water in the targeted areas. These storm surges, rising many feet high, have been highly destructive to homes and communities, as well as the lives of many.

Exodus 15: 13, 17-18, 20-21: “Steadfast love” “refers to God’s loyalty and devotion to His people, a loyalty created by the bond of God’s covenant with His people. Though we might expect it to be used for the devotion of God’s people to Him, its overwhelming use is as a description of God’s devotion to His people. Since God reveals Himself in devotion to His own, there is no stronger term to express the free and faithful grace of His love (34:6, ‘abounding in steadfast love’; Ps. 136, ‘his steadfast love endures forever’)” (*The ESV Reformation Study Bible*). Note that Miriam is the first woman in the Old Testament to be called a prophet. She is a spiritual and political leader for the children of Israel (Micah 6:4). We see here that God’s deliverance upsets patriarchal norms. Verse 17 contains “a brief summary of the aims of the Exodus. The purpose was the settlement of Israel as God’s special people in the Promised Land, the sanctuary of



God’s dwelling.” In other words, “The land would become such by God’s indwelling presence, reminding readers that the goal of the Exodus was the worship of God in the land.

Apart from God's gracious presence, there was no point in going to the land (33:15)" (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*). "Your own mountain" suggests the "point of contact between heaven and earth will be here. Deities in the ancient world were thought to inhabit mountains, and Israel took over this concept poetically. Here the whole of Palestine is viewed as the place of revelation (Deut. 3:25; Ps. 78:54; Is. 11:9)" (*Ibid.*).

ELEVATE: (10 MIN.)

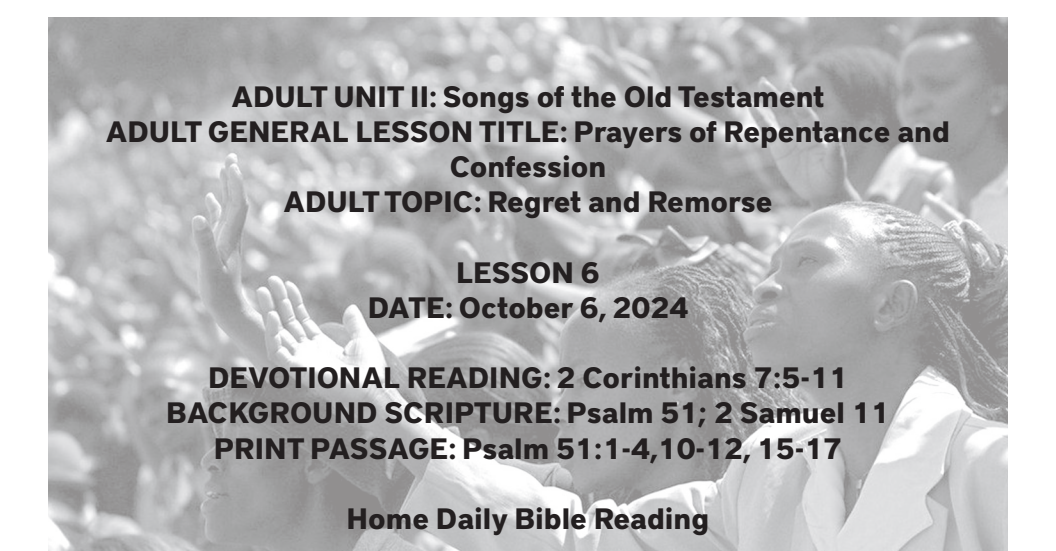
Break into small groups and discuss the following issues and questions: 1. Ponder this: When in your life have you been filled with great joy? What was the occasion? What responses to these occasions are most gratifying to you? 2. Make a list of what brings you joy. Are there times when the sources of your joy change: what do the differences tell you? 3. Talk about how you may determine to have *Miriam Moments*, times during the day when you smile and thank God for all good things. 4. Name your *Red Sea* experiences, times when you've passed through a harrowing event, and give thanks for God's salvation. Share this experience with the group. Relate the contents of the 23rd Psalm with such an experience.

iTHINK: (5–7 min.)

1. Play a recording of Edwin Hawkins's "Oh Happy Day" and discuss how it is or is not a fitting complement to Miriam's song.
2. Name ways to celebrate, such as dancing, drumming, singing, laughing, and smiling. Ask a participant to teach a simple dance to the group. Imagine Miriam's celebration of joy.
3. Review the video "Overview: Exodus 1-19" at bibleproject.com and set today's text in its literary/historical context.
4. Create a timeline noting God's answers to prayer across your local church's history and how the church celebrated God's responses.
5. Create a liturgy, song, or prayer for your congregation's worship that celebrates God's answers to prayer.
6. Name women in leadership roles and the reasons they command respect.

KEY VERSE: The prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. Exodus 15:20





ADULT UNIT II: Songs of the Old Testament
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Prayers of Repentance and Confession
ADULT TOPIC: Regret and Remorse

LESSON 6
DATE: October 6, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 7:5-11
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 11
PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17

Home Daily Bible Reading

Sept. 30	M	Hebrews 10:26-35	Do Not Persist in Sin
Oct. 1	T	2 Corinthians 7:5-11	Godly Grief Leads to Repentance
Oct. 2	W	Proverbs 28:4-18	The Righteous and the Wicked
Oct. 3	Th	2 Sam 11:1-5, 14-24	Sin's Deadly Spiral
Oct. 4	F	Lam 5:1-3, 15-22	God, Restore Us
Oct. 5	Sa	John 21:15-19	Follow Christ
Oct. 6	Su	Psalm 51:1-13, 16-17	Create in Me a Clean Heart

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Is Your All on the Altar of Sacrifice Laid?” - #527 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 15-17 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

15 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Affirmation— We will confess personal and corporate sins that require repentance. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

It is challenging for people to acknowledge that they have hurt others. When we have wronged others, how do we make amends for our actions and words? When David's sinful actions caused harm to others, he repented and found forgiveness in the Lord. Break into small groups and discuss with the following issues and questions: 1. Consider the problems we usually encounter or struggle with, in respect to guilt, repentance, and forgiveness in our relationships. When does each become a problem and how does it affect the continuance of a relationship? 2. How difficult is it for one to acknowledge that she/he has hurt another person, whether friend or not? Why is there difficulty in this? 3. What part does guilt play in such a case, and how does it affect the one who has caused the harm? 4. What about the one who has been hurt or wronged? How does he or she normally feel about being wronged and toward the one responsible? Are there always ways to make amends for hurtful actions? What does this depend on? 5. Do people willingly forgive others who show remorse and change their ways? Explain your answer.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Psalm 51:1-4: The *ESV Reformation Study Bible* calls attention to how "uniquely powerful" this psalm is as a "statement of the depths of sin and repentance" and asserts that it is "the most striking of the 'prayers of penitence,'" comparing it with Psalm 6. Although "David had been guilty of a great sin in the matter of Uriah, husband of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), he is confidently able to plead 'for God's mercy, in keeping with [God's] promised love for His people', and he is well aware of 'God's forgiveness of sinners' resulting from that mercy. Though sinners may deserve death, 'He gives life.'" In summary of David's sin: he covets another man's wife (2 Samuel 11:2-3), commits adultery with her

(11:4-5), attempts to cover up the affair through deceit (11:6-13), and eventually masterminds the murder of the woman's husband Uriah (11:14-17). Yet, David is convicted, admits his guilt, and repents (12:13, 16-17). He declares that his sin is against God alone (Psalm 51:4; compare 2 Samuel 12:13). The Hebrew word *chesed* is the Old Testament's favorite way of characterizing God. *Chesed* is most frequently translated, "loving-kindness," and is repeated with such frequency throughout the Old Testament that it must surely rank as highest among God's attributes. Over the centuries of Christian faith, many a biblical scholar has been drawn to mine the depths of its full meaning. Though volumes have been written, no words sufficiently capture all that is embedded in God's *chesed*. It conveys a love so relentless that God's propensity to forgive our offenses measures on a scale a thousand times greater than God's inclination to punish (Deuteronomy 5:9-10). It is this extravagantly merciful God, whom David poignantly encounters and praises in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:10-12: David places himself completely at the mercy of God and pleads for God to take full control. He speaks of the Holy Spirit as being within him as if it is like the Holy Spirit indwells Christians after the Day of Pentecost. Actually, we see that the Holy Spirit is known to fill the lives of believers (51:11; see also Numbers 27:18; Isaiah 63:10-11, 14; Micah 3:8; Haggai 2:5; Zechariah 7:12). Therefore, David did not want God's Spirit to leave him the way it had left Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). As the *ESV Reformation Study Bible* points out, "The Old Testament does not make a full disclosure of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. David understands that his spiritual well-being depends on God's presence with him. He fears that the Spirit may be taken away because the Spirit is holy and David is sinful." In verse 6 (not in our scripture), David speaks of being purged with *hyssop*, also known as marjoram, a plant with leaves that can hold liquids. It was used to cleanse those who were ceremonially unclean by dipping the leaves in water and sprinkling the water over those who were unclean (Leviticus 14:4; Numbers 19:18).

Psalm 51:15-17: Sacrifice was to be accompanied by a repentant heart (51:17). God delights in proper sacrifices, those offered with a broken and contrite heart (51:19). The people are often criticized and even condemned for the use of empty rituals in seeking to please God and make-up for their sins and transgressions. David is well aware of God's displeasure with this hypocrisy. It is well addressed in the prophecies of a number of prophets, especially Isaiah, Amos, and Micah. In Micah 5 and 6, for instance, the inquiry of the people as to what the Lord will require of them in terms of sacrificing for their sins and transgressions is staunchly answered with a renunciation of the greatest of outward acts of repentance and sacrifice. In verse 8 of chapter 6, Micah declares: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord re-

quire of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (NRSVUE)

Yet *the ESV Reformation Study Bible* points out: "The Bible values heartfelt obedience above outward religious conformity (40:6-8; Mic. 6:6-8). As v. 19 [not in our scripture] shows, this did not condemn sacrifices as such."

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Break into small groups and respond to the following challenges: 1.) Ponder this: Do you think repentance should be a prerequisite for forgiveness? Why or why not? 2.) Discuss how to facilitate forgiveness, such as not letting the sun go down on an argument. 3.) Memorize and repeat Bryan Stevenson's words, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." Read *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson. 4.) When you pass the peace during worship, silently forgive anyone with whom you've had a conflict. 5.) Search images on the Internet (Google Images, for example) or in magazines and print/cut out pictures of hurt, broken relationships, confessions, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Affix them to a bulletin board or posterboard as a daily reminder to look and listen for opportunities for grace and mercy.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Invite the learners to tell a story of their experience of asking for and/or receiving forgiveness.
2. Discuss whether any act is unforgivable. Give examples and explain.
3. Watch the waterfall scene in the movie *The Mission*. Wonder about the differences between penance and repentance. When is penance justified? What penance, if any, did David make after he confessed his sin?
4. Review the hymnal for versions of Psalm 51 and other hymns about forgiveness, such as "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy." How do the hymns express the confession and repentance of David? Sing several hymns together.
5. Consider the notion that David's sin broke down the protection that God offered Jerusalem. How does our sin affect God's relationships with others?
6. Lead a study of the Hebrew word *chesed*, or "steadfast love." Highlight the connection between this word and the covenants God established with the people. How does *chesed* relate to *agape* (Greek, "sacrificial love")?

KEY VERSE: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

ADULT UNIT II: Songs of the Old Testament
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Plea for Deliverance
ADULT TOPIC: We're in a Tight Spot

LESSON 7

DATE: October 13, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 107:23-32
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 22; Daniel 3
PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 22:1-11

Home Daily Bible Reading

Oct. 7	M	Luke 13:10-17	Set Free from Bondage
Oct. 8	T	Daniel 3:8-18	Our God Is Able to Deliver
Oct. 9	W	Daniel 3:19-27	Our God Is Unstoppable
Oct. 10	Th	Matthew 8:5-17	A Cry for Help in Distress
Oct. 11	F	Mark 10:46-52	Have Mercy on Me!
Oct. 12	Sa	Psalm 107:23-32	God Delivers Us from Our Distress
Oct. 13	Su	Psalm 22:1-11, 19-22	Deliver My Soul, O God

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Father, I Stretch My Hands to Thee”- #494 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymn*

Declaration – Psalm 22:1-11 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. ⁵ To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by

the people. ⁷ All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ⁸ “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. ¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God. ¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Affirmation – We will rely on the Lord’s help in times of struggle and always. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People tend to feel desperate or alone amid tragic circumstances. What can calm their feelings? Calling on God for help gives a sense of release and bolsters hope for divine rescue.

Break into small groups and discuss the following questions: 1.) Can you recall any time when tragedy struck you, a family member, or a friend and the impact the tragedy had? If so, discuss with your group. Describe what happened. What sense of desperation was experienced? What emotional and/or physical pain resulted? 2.) What causes people to want to blame others or something beyond their control for their tragic circumstances? Can self-examination help in finding the cause of such circumstances? 3.) Whatever the cause, is there a sure source of help for anyone facing tragedy? Many may taunt or mock persons who are in deep trouble, but what great release may come from someone who reaches out to one in such trouble? Explain.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Psalm 22:1-5: In spite of the fact that Psalm 22 begins with a cry of anguish, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” the *Asbury Bible Commentary* points out that significant scholarly studies and commentary include Psalm 22 among a number of “Thanksgiving Psalms,” which they characterize a certain way: “The Thanksgiving Songs constitute the joyful reflex of the Prayer Songs (see Ps. 0:5), especially those for Deliverance From Accusation and Persecution, for here those cries have been heard. The terrible plights encountered in those prayers are now history. They surface here only to recount God’s faithful deliverance. Certain death and destruction (18:4-5), enemies and illness (30:1-2), a sense of forsakenness by God (22:1), sin and the terror of God’s anger (30:5; 32:3-4), and the scorn of it all (22:7-8) appear in testimony of

the Lord's saving answer. In every case he has made the day in which gladness appears (118:24) The components of praise on the basis of recounted deliverance are common to almost all of these songs. The entire opening, two-thirds of (Psalm 22) recounts the desperate, deadly attack in which the psalmist felt deserted by God (22:1-21); a picture so bleak, one despairs ever hearing from him. Reflecting God's rescue later, the latter third of the song is as victorious and confident as the first section is despondent (22:22-31)" (*The Asbury Bible Commentary*). Notably, this Psalm 22 is also taken as the prediction of the words of Jesus on the cross: "The psalmist cries in anguish the 'why?' of the righteous sufferer. Where is the presence God has promised (Jodh. 1:5)? The cry is taken up by Jesus, who knew the reality of a total abandonment that was only partial with David. In the place of David and all the people of God, Jesus bore the dreadful curse that sin deserves" (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*).

Psalm 22:6-11: Especially noteworthy of the Psalms is that we hear the voice of the people offering up prayers to God, whereas all other Scripture assumes an audience listening to the voice of God. In the Psalms, we hear echoes of our own lived experience issuing out of the whole gamut of human emotion from rage to ecstasy, from lament to thanksgiving. For more on the human dimension of the Psalms, see Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2001). Psalm 22 expresses our ultimate anxiety—being abandoned by God (vv. 1-2, 11). Yet even when we blame God for our grief-stricken condition (vv. 6-9a), we entreat God to rescue us and promise that "in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (v. 22b). "Beyond David's current feelings and predicament, we see the self-humbling of Jesus



in these verses as a ‘worm’, and not as a man. See the reproach, lies and spite of those who ridicule Him and mock Him. Jesus, the Son of Man, although conceived by the Holy Spirit through the virgin Mary, knows God as His Father in eternity, from eternity and for eternity. In his vulnerable humanity, He seeks divine help” (*Bible Panorama*).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and respond to the following questions and issues: 1.) Recall, if possible, a time when you felt most abandoned by God. What did it feel like? 2.) Ponder this: What does Psalm 22 say to you about the suffering of other human beings? Does it help you pay attention to them? 3.) When you or a loved one is ill, is it possible to reject the thought that it is a sign of God’s displeasure. 4.) Play a recording of a song that evokes deep feelings. For example, Frank Sinatra’s “Where Are You?” or Janis Ian’s “At Seventeen.” Compare the despair rendered by the song(s) with the feeling evoked in Psalm 22. How does a tune inform the emotional power of a lyric? 5.) How do you employ the psalms in your personal worship? Use a daily lectionary to read, pray, and sing the psalms as a regular part of your devotional life. 6.) Reflect on Psalm 22 in the context of Jesus’s quoting it as he was crucified (see Matthew 27:46ff), specifically considering how sharing in suffering with Jesus gives you a new perspective on your struggles.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Compare the language of suffering in the psalm with David’s travails when he was fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 19–30) or Absalom (2 Samuel 15–17).
2. Make a case for David affirming God as the “Holy One” while experiencing the anguish of suffering. Discuss the significance of recalling God’s past deliverances during a tragedy.
3. Discuss the difference between suffering out of despair and from self-pity. How are these kinds of suffering qualitatively different?
4. Name ways people suffer as they protest racial inequality, climate, and economic disparities among people. On what issues do we fail to courageously confront our society?
5. Sing a hymn based on Psalm 22, such as “All Ye That Fear Jehovah’s Name.”
6. Discuss the response to suffering and despair in the psalm with contemporary issues such as the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements.

KEY VERSE: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Psalm 22:1



ADULT UNIT II: Songs of the Old Testament
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Praise for Deliverance
ADULT TOPIC: Dinner Time!

LESSON 8
DATE: October 20, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 1:3-14
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 25; Daniel 6:10-28
PRINT PASSAGE: Isaiah 25:1-10a

Home Daily Bible Reading

Oct. 14	M	<i>Ephesians 1:3-14</i>	<i>Redemption through Christ's Blood</i>
Oct. 15	T	<i>1 Peter 1:3-12</i>	<i>Praise God for New Birth</i>
Oct. 16	W	<i>Daniel 6:10-17</i>	<i>May Your God Deliver You</i>
Oct. 17	Th	<i>Daniel 6:18-28</i>	<i>God Shut the Lions' Mouths</i>
Oct. 18	F	<i>Judges 5:1-5, 12-22</i>	<i>Deborah's Song of Deliverance</i>
Oct. 19	Sa	<i>Luke 17:11-18</i>	<i>Praising God with a Loud Voice</i>
Oct. 20	Su	<i>Isaiah 25:1-10a</i>	<i>God's Victory Feast</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” - #286 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Isaiah 25:1-10a (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

God Will Swallow Up Death Forever

¹ O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you; I will praise your name, for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

² For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the foreigners' palace is a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. ³ Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴ For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall, ⁵ like heat in a dry place. You subdue the noise of the foreigners; as heat by the shade of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is put down.

⁶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹ It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." ¹⁰ For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain,....

Affirmation – We will remain hopeful in God’s future deliverance based on God’s past actions (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



People seek refuge during the stormy trials of life. Who can encourage and support us in our distress? God’s promises and faithfulness can assure us that we will endure until the storm passes. Break into small groups and respond to the following: 1.) Where do we normally look for help during difficult times? To friends? To family members? To

a higher power? How do we react when help is slow in coming? 2.) When we succeed in overcoming our difficulties, we may celebrate by holding parties and feasts. In such celebrations how do we show gratitude to whoever has helped us make it through? Is it possible that we may take the credit for our successes and forget about the help we received? Explain. 3.) Whom do you appreciate more, the pessimist or the optimist in the normal processes of living? How do you characterize yourself in this regard? To which would you turn in times of trouble? Do you respond positively or negatively to others who speak eloquently about hope for the future? Why or why not?

Isaiah 25:1-5: The *ESV Reformation Study Bible* considers Isaiah 25 as being among a group of chapters referred to as an apocalypse. It states of chapters 24-27, "This section of Isaiah is often called an 'apocalypse.' The prophet



holds before sinner and godly the clear teaching that the day of the Lord brings judgment on creation and the fullness of salvation for the saints. God's plan of redemption includes restoration from exile, the blessings of Christ in the church, and the establishment of God's kingdom in all nations. Ch. 24 focuses on God's overthrow of the corrupted earth; ch. 25, on the praise that comes

to Him in response; and chs. 26 and 27 on God's interaction with His people. Brilliant assonances, incapable of translation, enhance the prophetic message." This is conceivable for sure. For instance, in Isaiah 24:1–25:12, God judges the earth and provides a great feast on Mount Zion for all peoples who recognize his lordship. Royalty and people of means usually sponsored banquets to honor victories and special occasions. In the cultural practices, gods also did this; especially, when one of them was enthroned. Though these banquets were for the gods, the people would join in the feasting when the enthronement was celebrated annually.

Isaiah 25:6-10a: "All peoples" (mentioned in vv. 6-7) does not include everyone indiscriminately. Those who continue to defy God in their "pride" and "struggle" (v. 11; NIV "cleverness") will not feel his hand of deliverance. Instead, they will "be brought down, laid low, cast to the ground, even to the dust" (v. 12). Although "Isaiah invokes and praises God for His faithfulness in all that He has done, he sees Him reducing a rebel city to nothing. Perhaps Babylon is in mind. He sees Him providing a refuge and help for His people. He looks forward to a time of rejoicing at the great banquet God will hold on Mount Zion for those who have remained faithful to Him in the last days. He acknowledges God's power to swallow up death and wipe away tears.... Moab, a representative of all ungodly and powerful nations in this context, will be trampled, swept

aside and brought down by the Lord" (*Bible Panorama*). Death is personified in the OT (e.g., Psalm 49.14). Yahweh "will swallow up death forever" (Isaiah 25:8; cf. Revelation 7:17; 21:4) for "all peoples" (vv. 6-7), not just the chosen people of Israel. Even though the ruthless peoples are identified as "foreigners" (vv. 2, 5 NIV; "aliens" NRSV), God intends to include those persons as well in his "feast" (v. 6).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and respond to the following: 1.) Discuss how God comforts you as your strength, your "refuge," and your "shade" (v. 4). 2.) What do you think Isaiah would think of the phrase, "Hope for the best but expect the worst"? 3.) Memorize "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces" (v. 8). What would possibly result if you repeated it every time you turned on a light or lamp to proclaim God's hope. 4.) Plant a tree to claim God's protection as a "shade." Reflect on who might rest under the shade of the tree and say a prayer of thanks. 5.) Isaiah claims that "we have waited [for God]." Practice patience in your family, church, or work team. What is the benefit of such patience in waiting? 6.) Host a potluck feast for friends and family. Invite people you don't know to celebrate the diversity of God's people ("all peoples"). Share stories of God's faithfulness.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Review Israel and Judah's eighth-century B.C. political context amid Assyria's resurgence. Connect the review to Isaiah's specific assurances of God's faithfulness.
2. Write a personal testimony or song of thanksgiving to God's faithfulness
3. Discuss: The world suffers because people refuse to look to God. How are you encouraged knowing that nations will worship ("fear") God (v. 3) one day?
4. Review the events that occur on mountains in Scripture and discuss the symbolic significance of mountains in those stories.
5. Compare Isaiah 25's feast with Psalm 23 (a banquet in the presence of enemies) and Matthew 22 (the wedding banquet).
6. Discuss God's defeat of death as not merely about the afterlife, but about removing the "shroud" that covers us, the fear and pain that get in the way of God's promised abundant life.

KEY VERSE: On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. Isaiah 25:6

ADULT UNIT II: Songs of the Old Testament
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Trust in God Alone
ADULT TOPIC: Let the Silence Speak

LESSON 9

DATE: October 27, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Jeremiah 17:5-11
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 62
PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 62:1-12

Home Daily Bible Reading

Oct. 21	M	Mark 9:14-27	<i>I Believe, Help My Unbelief!</i>
Oct. 22	T	Psalm 28	<i>God Is My Strength and Shield</i>
Oct. 23	W	Proverbs 3:1-8, 13-14	<i>Trust God with All Your Heart</i>
Oct. 24	Th	1 John 4:4-13	<i>God in You Is Greater</i>
Oct. 25	F	1 John 4:14-21	<i>Boldness on the Day of Judgment</i>
Oct. 26	Sa	Jeremiah 17:5-11	<i>Blessed Are Those Who Trust God</i>
Oct. 27	Su	Psalm 62	<i>Wait upon God's Salvation</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or learner

Celebration – “Blessed Quietness”- #226 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Psalm 62 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively)

¹ For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.

² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. ³ How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence? ⁴ They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. *Selah*

⁵ For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷ On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. ⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

⁹ Those of low estate are but a breath; those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰ Put no trust in extortion; set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

¹¹ Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, ¹² and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For you will render to a man according to his work.

Affirmation— I will seek to experience the calm that comes from knowing God as a source of peace and protection. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

There are times when the fast pace of life keeps us in a frenzy. Where can we find solitude and calm? In stillness and quiet, the psalmist finds God's salvation, hope, refuge, and deliverance. In our fast paced and busy lives, we often take little time for rest and work/life balance, we may feel put upon by our responsibilities and others' expectations. Discuss how such ways of living cause burnout for so many of us. Discuss how we might find ways to have quiet times and places. Do some people mistakenly rely on pills or alcohol to achieve rest? If so, how does that work for them? Discuss how some find a need for outside influence to commit to rest and stillness.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Psalm 62:1-7: Psalm 62 suggests a time when Saul's family threatened David. When threatened by enemies, the psalmist commits himself to God. The psalm is composed of three parts (vv. 3-4, 5-8, 9-10), framed by a confession of finding rest in God (vv. 1-2) and the reason for such trust (vv. 11-12). The phrase "waits in silence" (v. 1) translates a Hebrew word for motionless waiting, stillness. The stillness of the whole being ("soul": *nephesh* refers to the human being in totality, mind, body, spirit) indicates the psalmist's trust and confidence. See Exodus 14:14; Psalm 46:10. The Hebrew word we translate "alone" occurs seven times in Psalm 62. The psalmist trusts in God alone (v. 1). God alone is my rock (v. 2), see also verses 5-7. The psalm conveys an affirmation of trust that rests exclusively and entirely in God. Silence and stillness are often expressed in scripture and song as ways to encounter God. Such are the expressions in Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God"; Exodus 14:13-14: "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." Elijah experienced the wind, the earthquake, and the fire before he heard God speak to him in the "still small voice," 1 Kings

19:11-13. Obviously, we are often too concerned with ourselves and our own thoughts to hear the voice of God. The hymn “Blessed Quietness” expresses well the experience of the Holy Spirit bringing quietness and assurance to our stressful lives. One of our songs, “Precious Memories,” says,



“In the stillness of the midnight, precious sacred scenes unfold.”

Psalm 62:8-12: The psalmist calls on all godly people to trust God (vv. 8-10), moving from an individual, personal trust, to exhorting the congregation to do the same – “my refuge” becomes “a refuge for us” (v. 8). Human beings are but “breath” (v. 9), unreliable. Their riches and power are too often the results of extortion and theft. Even when fortunes are gained legitimately, there is a danger in self-reliance (“if riches increase, do not set your heart on them”). The Hebrew term (62:9, *beney ish*, “those of high estate”) is a euphemism for the wealthy and powerful and a generic term for all people of influence. Both Egyptian and Babylonian texts contain similar expressions for this class of individuals, contrasting those who were sophisticated, cultured, and refined by their standing in society with those who were not. The psalmist’s confidence is bolstered by remembering God’s “power” and “steadfast love” (vv. 11-12). God’s deliverance is an act of love. The covenant God will reward those who trust in God; in this instance, reward equals being saved from enemies. “God is not only able to save the psalmist; He desires to do so. render . . . according to his work. The psalmist has a long-range perspective here, since at present the righteous are often at the mercy of the wicked. From the New Testament, we understand that there will be many unresolved injustices in the present life until Christ returns” (*ESV Reformation Study Bible*). Comments of *Bible Panorama* are insightful for the closing verses of this psalm (vv.9-12): “V 9: **Weighing** God knows the true weight of ungodly men. They are lighter than vapor and have no righteousness that registers on the scales. V 10: **Worldliness** not only oppression and robbery must be rejected, but so must worldly and materialistic

dependence upon increased riches. They can never meet man's spiritual needs. V 11-12: **Word**, mercy, power, and justice are in David's mind after God has spoken to him. God's word is crucially important."

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Practice and share the following spiritual growth experiences and exercises: 1.) Spend thirty minutes waiting on God in silence and record your thought process during that time. 2.) Recall an experience where turning to God in stillness and silence brought peace. Compare this experience with others in which you sought alternative remedies. 3.) Survey your community to identify places of peace and quiet. Then organize a group to develop other sanctuaries of silence. 4.) Read prayerfully Psalms 61, 62, and 63 in one sitting. What are the common themes? How does reading in this manner speak to your spirit? What will you do in response? 5.) When you are confronted with the realities of the world, when people seem to be nothing other than menacing and the world offers no solution either in its people or its practices, how will you respond based on your spiritual reading of Psalm 62? 6.) Breathe and pray, "Be still and know that I am God. Be still and know that I am. Be still and know. Be still. Be."

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Discuss how Psalm 62 captures the tone of our times—assaults, lies, cursing, hypocrisy, materialism, meanness, everyone trying to topple someone else.
2. Offer a presentation on how stillness and silence reflect Israel's relationship to Yahweh. Silence shows proper respect and attention to learn God's will and purpose. Stillness echoes the Sabbath rest, which witnesses to Israel's dependence on God rather than on human strength and endeavor. See Exodus 14:14 and Psalm 46:10.
3. Ponder the significance of escaping the modern world's noise—name times when you have sought silence and describe the experience.
4. Play Van Morrison's song "Hymns to the Silence" and compare it to the emotion of Psalm 62.
5. Locate the chant version of Psalm 62 by Robert Batastini. Ask your church musician or look at https://hymnary.org/tune/rest_in_god_alone_rest_in_god_batastini. Sing the chant by asking a leader to sing the verses while the group sings the refrain. Discuss how the music captures the mood of the psalm.

KEY VERSE: For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. Psalm 62:5

ADULT UNIT III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Confidence in God's Shepherding
ADULT TOPIC: When the Road Is Long

LESSON 10

DATE: November 3, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 10:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 23; John 10:11-14

PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 23

Home Daily Bible Reading

Oct. 28	M	Ezekiel 34:1-6	Sheep without a Shepherd
Oct. 29	T	Ezekiel 34:7-16	God Opposes Unfit Leaders
Oct. 30	W	Ezekiel 34:17-31	God Will Appoint a Shepherd
Oct. 31	Th	John 10:1-10	The Good Shepherd Defends the Flock
Nov. 1	F	John 10:11-18	The Good Shepherd Gives His Life
Nov. 2	Sa	Revelation 7:1-4, 9-17	The Lamb Will Be Their Shepherd
Nov. 3	Su	Psalm 23	The Lord Is My Shepherd

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Saviour, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” - #278 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Psalm 23; John 10:11-14 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

¹ The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Affirmation— Because the Lord is our Shepherd, we have everything we need. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Sheep grazed on the lush grass produced by spring rains (23:2). In the summer and autumn, they fed on weeds and stubble left over from harvest. Like camels, sheep can go long periods without water and then drink as much as 2.5 gallons. Unlike goats, sheep are wholly dependent on the shepherd to find pasture and water for them. Shepherds also provided shelter, medication, and aid in birthing. King Ammiditana (Babylon, 1683–1640 BCE) claims that the god, Ea, gave him the wisdom to shepherd his people, provide them with beautiful pastures and watering places, and make them lie down in safe pastures. The rod was a club worn at the belt, while the staff was a walking implement that doubled as a weapon in a time of need (1 Samuel 17:35) and guided and controlled the sheep.

Phrases such as “prepare a table,” “anoint my head with oil” indicate practices of hospitality. Offering food to an enemy would have established the right relationship between the host and the guest. Yahweh, as shepherd-king, extends protection to those who dine with him (cf. 2 Samuel 9:7; 2 Kings 25:27-30). Olive oil could be used to treat dry or cracked skin and would be offered to visitors. The psalmist is refreshed by entering God’s hospitable presence.

The Hebrew verb *shuv* is most often translated “to turn” or “return.” Given the prevalence of images of traveling throughout the psalm, it is most appropriate to translate the last line this way: “I will continually return to Yahweh’s presence, my whole life long.” The person of faith who seeks after God’s presence will identify with the psalm’s image of seeking God as a long-term journey.”

John 10:1-18. God was Israel’s chief shepherd, which corresponds to John’s message about Jesus. Israel’s leaders are here associated with former leaders of Israel who were condemned as exploitive shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1-2; Ezekiel 34:2-6, 8). Because the human shepherds of Israel failed to care for the sheep properly, God promised to shepherd the people (Ezekiel 34:11-17). The good shepherd lays down his life to protect the sheep—thus suffering at the hands of the thieves, robbers, and wolves.

By putting the man out of the synagogue, Israel’s leaders treated him as an outcast. Jesus, as the good shepherd, affirms that the man is one of his sheep, i.e., belongs to God’s people (Psalms 74:1; 78:52; 79:13; 100:3).

See “My own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father” (John 10:14-15). In the promised new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31), God’s people know him (Jeremiah 31:34). The intimate relationship between the Father and the Son is here shared with believers (cf. John 15:15; 16:13-15).

In **Unit III, Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise**, the lessons look at four songs from the Hebrew psalter (fitting the US calendar in its season of thanksgiving). In Lesson 10, we look at Psalm 23, supplemented with John’s affirmation about Jesus as the good shepherd. The background for Lesson 11 is Psalms 146–150 with 146 and 150 the songs for emphasis. Lesson 12 examines Psalm 100, a summons to all people to praise God. The final session, Lesson 13, marks the beginning of Advent with a look at Psalm 139, a reminder of the intimate relationship God shares with humanity.

Break into small groups. Consider and discuss the following questions: 1.) Adults are familiar with shepherds and the vocation of shepherding. Describe the role of the shepherd in the lives of sheep and how it relates to us and our Shepherd, the Lord. 2.) Adults assess the trustworthiness of the outside sources for guidance. How is the Shepherd viewed as an outside source for guidance? 3.) Adults are glad to know that they are loved and remembered. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? Please share.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

The Lord Is My Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-3): In these first three verses, the psalmist addresses the shepherd (God) both indirectly and metaphorically. When we were in elementary school, we learned about similes and metaphors. We were told that they were both figures of speech. That a simile uses the words “like” or “as” and that a metaphor was described as a comparison between two unlike things. For example, you may describe someone metaphorically as a “clown,” meaning they are silly or foolish (Oxford English Dictionary). In our passage today, we see our God likened (metaphorically) to a shepherd. In this passage, the shepherd leads his sheep to meadows where there is an abundant supply of grass for rest. The shepherd also takes his sheep to waters that are calm (quiet) so the sheep can drink. “He restores my soul,” conjures images of one near death who needs to be revived and in need of the breath of life. There is a shift in the latter portion of verse 3. The Shepherd is no longer portrayed metaphorically, but now, as One who is able to help the sheep, “for his name’s sake” (Salter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms*, 2007. Pg. 78).



Though I Walk Through the Valley (Psalm 4-6):

In these three verses, the psalmist addresses God directly. The metaphor continues as the psalmist compares himself to a sheep who is being cared for by a highly skilled shepherd. The psalmist, David, lists ways God, the shepherd provides for us. The psalmist says, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (NRSV). In other words, even when I face the

worst life has to offer, I will not be afraid, because you are there, and your rod and staff provide both guidance and support. (Psalm 23:4-6 meaning | TheBibleSays.com, cited May 12, 2024). The rod provides comfort to the sheep, as it is there to protect the flock. The shepherd’s staff has a crook and is used to rescue sheep that get stuck in obscure places or sheep that may have wandered from the flock. In ancient times, when meals were prepared, they were typically elaborate meals with the host offering nothing but the best for their guest. The meal here is reminiscent of that meal.

In verse 5, God is portrayed as the host of a meal. A table prepared for the psalmist in the presence of his enemies. The psalmist says, “you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows” (NRSV). This was typically done by the host to honor guests (an intentional oversight by the Pharisee in Luke 7:46 when Jesus entered his home). Apparently, the host has given the guest a large cup of wine, which the guest finds satisfying. In verse 6, the psalmist says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long” (NRSV). And now, there should be no doubt the goodness and mercy that God has for us. The psalmist does not worry about the pursuit of the enemy, but fixes his gaze on God’s goodness and mercy which are always in pursuit of him. The psalmist ends by defining his permanent dwelling place—to dwell in the house of the Lord. He could mean his heavenly home or a temple here on earth. In ancient times, once the temple was built, people perceived God to dwell both in heaven and the temple. An attempt to try to determine the psalmist's intent would prove ineffective. The main point here is that David’s desire was to be in the presence of God—forever! (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2016-17, p. 269-271).

I Am the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-14): The metaphor continues...we started with God as shepherd, now Jesus, the Son is introduced as shepherd. There is a comparison between the good shepherd and the hired hand. Jesus, the good Shepherd is willing and, in fact, does lay down His life for the sheep. The hired hand runs and abandons the sheep. Psalm 23 painted the picture of the shepherd as provider and protector, so a true shepherd is one who does the opposite of the hired hand. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me," (NRSV).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1.) Discuss how the metaphors of a shepherd, travel companion, and host illumine the character of God. How do the metaphors address human conditions and the need for guidance? 2.) Note that the psalm only speaks of God as a shepherd in verses 1-3. The Lord becomes a travel companion (v. 4) and a host (vv. 5, 6). Prepare an infographic poster that shows the following scheme that focuses on the three testimonial statements of the psalmist: "I shall not want" defines the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd; "I fear no evil" informs the relationship between the traveler and the companion; and "I shall dwell" confirms the relationship between the guest and the host. 3.) Read and sing hymn versions of Psalm 23. Comment on your emotional connections to the psalm and the hymn settings.



iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Name someone that has been a shepherd for you. Say a prayer of thanks and send a note of gratitude.
2. Make a sign with the words, "I am God's beloved child." Post the sign on your bathroom mirror or somewhere else you will see it daily. Commit to saying the affirmation whenever you read it.
3. Purchase or make a new welcome mat for your home to extend God's hospitality.

KEY VERSE: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long. Psalm 23:6.

ADULT UNIT III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Songs of Praise
ADULT TOPIC: Who Can You Trust?

LESSON 11

DATE: November 10, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 148
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalms 146–150
PRINT PASSAGE: Psalms 146; 150

Home Daily Bible Reading

Nov. 4	M	Revelation 19:1-10	<i>The Lord God Almighty Reigns</i>
Nov. 5	T	Psalm 147:1-6, 12-20	<i>How Good to Sing God's Praises</i>
Nov. 6	W	Psalm 148	<i>Praise God from Heaven and Earth</i>
Nov. 7	Th	Luke 1:46-55	<i>My Soul Magnifies the Lord</i>
Nov. 8	F	Luke 1:68-79	<i>Blessed Be the God of Israel</i>
Nov. 9	Sa	Psalm 146	<i>Praise the Lord, O My Soul!</i>
Nov. 10	Su	Psalms 149–150	<i>Let Everything that Breathes Praise God!</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”- #23 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Psalms 146–150 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Put Not Your Trust in Princes

¹ Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! ² I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

³ Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. ⁴ When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners

free; ⁸ the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. ¹⁰ The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!

¹ Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! ² Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! ³ Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! ⁴ Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! ⁵ Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! ⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Affirmation – God deserves our highest praise! (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

After a personal vow of praise (146:1-2), the psalmist exhorts the people of God to trust the true ruler, the God of Zion (vv. 5-10), as opposed to earthly rulers (vv. 3-4). The Lord is the one who can truly care for the marginalized and oppressed (vv. 7-9). All the psalms in this section (Psalms 146-150), each of which begins and ends with “Praise the Lord”—*hallelu* is the plural imperative of the verb *hallel* (“to praise”), and *jah* (or *yah*) is shorthand for the personal name of God: Yahweh—reiterate themes from the rest of the Psalter.

The psalmist lists a series of actions that demonstrate the Lord’s disposition to help the oppressed. These can be correlated to comments in other psalms: “gives food to the hungry” (v.7; see 145:16); “sets the prisoners free” (v.7; see 107:3, 10); “lifts up those who are bowed down” (v.8; see 113:7; 145:14). The duty of any human king to defend the widow and orphan is well known in the ancient Near East (see Psalm 72:4, 12-14), and the same assumption would apply to any deity.

One evidence of God’s kingdom is to “[open] the eyes of the blind” (146:8). In Isaiah, the servant is instrumental in mediating this blessing (Isaiah 42:7; cf. Isaiah 29:18; 35:5). Jesus draws attention to His healing of the blind as a sign that he is the servant representing God’s kingdom (Matthew 11:5).

Psalm 150 completes the book with a resounding call to praise God. The word *praise* is used thirteen times in just six verses. This psalm announces that all is now said and done in the Book of Psalms; all that is left is simply to praise

God—nothing else matters.

Praise is to be given everywhere (v.1), for God’s deeds and character (v.2), and with any means available (vv.3-5). It concludes with a universal call to praise (v.6) that complements the individual call to praise at the beginning of Psalm 146 (“my soul,” v. 1). The words for “soul” in 146:1 and “breathes” in 150:6 are related to each other.

Verse 2 continues to call for the Lord to be praised and incorporates the reasons for that praise. Both the mighty deeds of the Lord and the Lord’s surpassing greatness are cited. The deeds are not specified, suggesting that all the acts of the Lord are indicated.

The Psalter concludes with a universal call to praise, an idea woven throughout the book (2:10-12; 22:27; 33:8; 48:10; 67:3, 5, 7; 97:1; 98:4-9; 99:1-3; 100:1; 103:20-22; 113:3; 117:1, 2; 145:21; 148:1-14).

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions:

- 1.) Adults respect leaders who have demonstrated faithful stewardship of their offices. Think of some example(s) of such leader(s). Share with the group.
- 2.) Adults appreciate it when leaders “go to bat” for them. Describe a time when someone has gone to bat (i.e., stood up) for you. Share with the group.
- 3.) On the contrary, some adults have been betrayed by leaders. Describe a time when you may have experienced such betrayal. Share with the group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Praise God for God’s Help (Psalm 146): There are five hallelujah psalms at the end of the Book of Psalms (146-150). And, although this psalm could be akin to the thanksgiving psalms, it is more accurate to view it as a psalm of praise because it is a general celebration of God’s benevolent qualities. (Salter, Robert. *The Book of Psalms*, 2007. Pg. 503). This psalm begins with a declaration of hallelujah or praise to the Lord – “as long as I live” (NRSV)—a reminder to the reader that we should give praise to God for the rest of our lives. In verses 3-4, the psalmist admonishes the readers not to direct their praise towards humankind, who are of no help. When they leave this earth, they are gone, but God is eternal. The writer goes on to say that we must put our hope in the Lord because it is God who made the heaven and earth and the One who “executes justice for the oppressed” and “gives food for the hungry” (NRSV). Those words alone should conjure feelings of praise! In verses 8-9, the psalmist provides a litany of reasons why one should praise the Lord, then ends the psalm as it began, with praise, by stating, “The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!” (NRSV).

Praise God for God's Greatness (Psalm 150): The last of the praise psalms, this psalm begins and ends with the declaration, "hallelujah!" In verses 1-2, we are told where to praise God, "in his sanctuary" (NRSV). Why to praise God, "for his mighty deeds according to his surpassing greatness" (NRSV).

The psalm shifts as we are told how to produce this praise. What can be used to uplift praise to this great God. The psalmist lists stringed instruments, wood-wind instruments (e.g., the flute), percussion instruments (e.g., the cymbals – both placid and boisterous). But he closes the psalm with a reminder to God's greatest created instrument – humankind – admonishing us all who were given breath by God our Creator to "Praise the Lord!"

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1.) List the virtues or qualities Psalms 146 and 150 ascribe to God. Link the qualities with familiar stories in the Old Testament. 2.) Debate the tension between Psalm 146:3-4's warning against giving our ultimate allegiance to any human or institution, and the nationalism prevalent in US politics/governance. Compare the tension between serving God and Caesar (Matthew 22:15-22). 3.) Describe the psalmist's sense of God's personal care and concern for all God has created. Discuss ways this care is expressed in your church's worship and outreach ministries. Name the ways that God's care for the poor is reflected in your congregation. In what ways does your church praise God for calling you to do justice in a world of inequality, oppression, and suffering?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Write the words "Praise the Lord" down the left side of a piece of paper and write the attributes of God that start with the letters. For what do you praise God today?
2. Psalm 150's references to God's "mighty deeds" and "greatness" evoke God's particular regard for the powerless and weak. Where have you seen or heard or felt the presence of God's power and mercy simultaneously? Give thanks when you see oppression defeated, for that is a sign of God's work. Offer a hallelujah.
3. Listen to Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah." How are the tone and mood of the song reflective of the themes in Psalms 146 and 150? Can you hear the praise coming through the melancholy?

KEY VERSE: I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Psalm 146:2



ADULT UNIT III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: A Song of Thanksgiving
ADULT TOPIC: A Gratitude Attitude

LESSON 12

DATE: November 17, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100

PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

Nov. 11	M	Psalm 28	<i>Give Thanks through Song</i>
Nov. 12	T	Ephs 5:1-2, 15-20	<i>Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs</i>
Nov. 13	W	Psalm 69:1-6, 30-36	<i>Magnify God with Thanksgiving</i>
Nov. 14	Th	Psalm 7:1-2, 6-17	<i>Give Thanks to the Righteous Judge</i>
Nov. 15	F	1 Thessalonians 1	<i>Thanks for Faithful Brothers and Sisters</i>
Nov. 16	Sa	Philippians 4:4-9	<i>Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving</i>
Nov. 17	Su	Psalm 100	<i>Worship the Lord with Gladness</i>

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “O Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea” - #241 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Psalm 100 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! ² Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

³ Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Affirmation – Oh, give thanks unto the Lord and bless His holy name. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Psalm 100 is a joyful call to thanks and praise. It has two sections (vv. 1-3; 4-5), each giving a call to and a reason for praise. The psalm celebrates the Lord's creation of his people (v. 3) and His care for His people (v. 5). Psalms 95 and 100 form a bracket around the sustained praise of the Lord as King (Psalms 96–99).



The opening invitation to “shout” and “worship” (vv. 1-2) is an invitation to celebrate the Lord's goodness and to rest in the presence of the one “who made us.” It is an affirmation of the worshippers' identity as God's beloved and chosen people. The psalm carries a note of intimacy (vv. 4-5) in that as worshippers, we are invited into the gates



and the courts of the Lord. We worship a God who is known to us by name with our thankful praise arising from who God is (v. 5) wholly, absolutely good, unchanging, and faithful through all generations. (For further study see, *New Bible Commentary*. Copyright Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, Leicester, England, 1953, 1954, 1970, 1994.)

“Us” (v. 3) likely refers to God’s “people” and “sheep.” Yahweh brought forth the nation of Israel (95:6; 149:2; Deuteronomy 32:6, 15, 18); Israel belonged to the Lord. The imperative “know” signifies acknowledgment or confession. The people confess Him as their covenant Lord, their only true God. They also acknowledge their accountability to God and their privileged position. The Lord, in turn, cares for them as their shepherd (74:1; 79:13; 95:7; Jeremiah 23:1; Ezekiel 34:31).

“His people” translates a Hebrew word that structurally is at the very center of the psalm. Everything preceding this leads up to this fundamental affirmation of God’s relationship with his people, and everything following it springs from it. Locating a poem’s main point at its structural center—whether it be a word, a phrase, or an entire verse—occurs many times in Psalms (6:6; 8:4; 20:6; 21:7; 23:4; 25:11; 42:8; 54:4; 71:14; 73:15; 74:12; 82:5; 92:8; 97:7; and 142:4). The temple (100:4) featured a fenced, outer courtyard, which surrounded the tabernacle (Exodus 27:9-19). The tabernacle was a tent that consisted of two rooms, the “holy place” (an entry court) and the “most holy place,” where the ark (the footstool of God’s throne) was set (Exodus 25:10-22; 26:30-34). The more permanent temple built by Solomon followed this basic design, but it was integrated into a more massive citadel structure (1 Kings 6:1-38; cf. Solomon’s palace, 1 Kings 7:9-12). The temple was viewed as Yahweh’s palace. Its architecture featured walls, gates, and courtyards, as would the citadel or palace complex of any king. It replicated what could be found in the ancient world.

“Gates” and “courts” signify actions familiar to ancient cultures. Gates were often used as places to conduct legal business; the open enclosures of courtyards were used for large assemblies of people. The temple gates and courts thus symbolized the idea of meeting with God.

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions:

- 1.) Some adults meet people and receive gifts that change their lives. Has this ever happened to you? What sort of gift did you receive? Share with the group.
- 2.) Adults express thankfulness with words, music, poems, and gestures of appreciation. Can you think of an example of appreciation given towards you or that you have expressed to someone else? Share with the group.
- 3.) Adults appreciate being thanked for acts of generosity and remembrance. Recall a time when you were remembered for your generosity or a time when your generosity went unnoticed. How did you feel? Share with the group.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

A Psalm of Thanksgiving (Psalm 100:1-3): Here the psalmist gets straight

to the point, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing” (NRSV). Here we are told what to do and how to do it. Then in verse 3, the writer tells us why we are to do it—because the “Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (NRSV). Once again, the metaphor of sheep and shepherd are presented in this psalm as in psalm 23.

A Psalm of Thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4-5): As we enter the sanctuary, we should be giving thanks to God, and not comparing shoes or outfits. Therefore, we are to “Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him; [and] bless his name” (NRSV). Why? “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations” (NRSV). A good God deserves our praise forever and for many generations to come. Our ancestors had little; but praised much—we have much; yet, we seem to praise little. In the words of JJ Hairston and Youthful Praise, “An incredible God deserves an incredible praise!”

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1.) Do you make comparisons with others about what you don’t have? The next time you find yourself wanting more, thank God instead. 2.) Discuss how your church’s worship evokes the psalm’s themes: entering into God’s presence with dynamic praise, singing, gladness, and devotion. 3.) Invite those willing to tell a personal story of liberation or justice that demonstrates God’s care for them. Make connections with the story of God’s faithfulness and steadfast love expressed throughout Israel’s salvation history.

iTHINK: (5–7 min.)

1. Read *Sing Praise*, a children’s book by Rhonda Gowler Greene that imagines a world where animals, humans, and all aspects of creation sing grateful praises to God. What will you take with you on your daily journey from this book?
2. Psalm 100, a song directed to the Lord who made us and whose faithfulness is for all generations, is a perfect hymn to read and sing for Thanksgiving. How can you make Psalm 100 a part of your holiday celebration this year?
3. In what way does “paying it forward” apply to your response to God’s acts enumerated in the psalm? How will you pay it forward? To whom?

KEY VERSES: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. Psalm 100:4

ADULT UNIT III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: God's Promised Presence
ADULT TOPIC: Wonderful Marvelous!

LESSON 13

DATE: November 24, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Exodus 33:12-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 139

PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 139:1-12

Home Daily Bible Reading

Nov. 18	M	Matthew 1:18-23	God Is with Us through Christ
Nov. 19	T	Exodus 33:12-23	My Presence Will Go with You
Nov. 20	W	Exodus 34:1-9	A Glimpse of the Merciful God
Nov. 21	Th	Psalm 16	Complete Joy in God's Presence
Nov. 22	F	Matthew 18:15-20	Where Two or Three Are Gathered
Nov. 23	Sa	Matthew 28:16-20	I Am with You Always
Nov. 24	Su	Psalm 139:1-12	God Searches and Knows Us

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “God Is Here” - #5 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Psalm 139:1-12 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness

shall cover me, and the light about me be night,”¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

Affirmation – You have searched me, known me, and yet, have chosen me. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

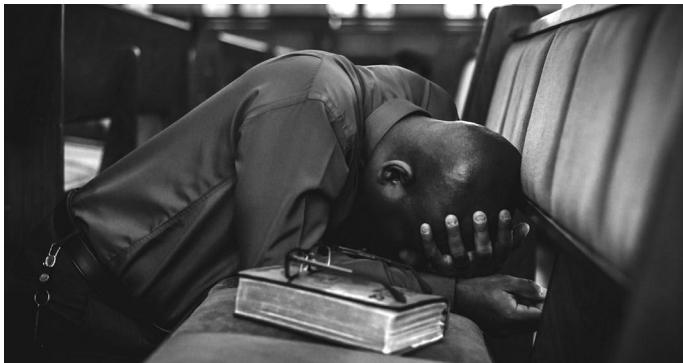
ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Know (in Hebrew *yada'*) is a rich word in biblical Hebrew. Adam “knew [*yada'*] “his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Genesis 4:1). God tells the people they will “know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 6:7, 13). We are to know God, just as God knows us.

It was common in the ancient world to claim that gods and kings knew everything, without limits. In Psalm 139, Yahweh’s knowing is judicial; he is the judge who has all the information for judging the psalmist’s case wisely and fairly.

Wonderfully (v. 14; Hebrew *pala'*), “to be different,” “remarkable.” The word is often used to describe the benevolent acts of God (cf. Psalms 9:1-2; 40:5; 78:4; 105:5).

“Psalm 139 is something of an exception in the Old Testament, speaking strongly and positively about the individual. Nevertheless, it acts as a foil to the modern obsession with privacy and the individual. . . While Psalm 139 is about the individual and has a very private feel to it, the psalm is even more about the invasion of our privacy—by none other than God. This is a comforting psalm in terms of God’s intimate knowledge of us and care for us. It is also a frightening psalm because to be known so intimately is ultimately to be open to the other.” (<http://hwallace.unitingchurch.org.au/WebOTcomments/OrdinaryC/Pent15Psalm139.html>. Accessed May 6, 2020.)



“Where can I flee from your presence?” (v. 7) is reminiscent of the meditations of Job. It is a hymn of praise to the God who knows “me.” Be attentive, however, to the fact that while the psalmist’s relation-



ship with God is profoundly personal, it is never private. The psalms were always used in the community's worship, not individual worship.

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions:

1.) Adults keep secrets about themselves, hiding their true selves away. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? Give examples. 2.) Adults who are fully known and loved marvel at and celebrate the joy of being known. Discuss some ways that this statement is true? 3.) Adults want to be understood fully and loved regardless of their flaws. Discuss how God loves us regardless of our flaws.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

An Omniscient God (Psalm 139:1): The psalmist, David, starts with a reminder that God knows about and cares for all of us. In his rendition, *My Understanding of Psalm 139:1*, Joe Carrigan writes, "He, God Himself, knows me. An insignificant life. Ordinary. One of millions who have walked this earth, and He knows me...I haven't done anything extraordinary that He should notice me. But He knows me...I am a sinner. I've made mistakes, I have fallen flat on my face and still the fact remains. He knows me." He closes with this statement, "Thank you Lord for loving me as I am, and for calling me to be more than I ever thought I could be." These powerful words echo the sentiments of the psalmist who reminds us that God is an all-knowing and caring God.

An Omnipotent God (Psalm 139:2-6):

The psalmist goes on to state not only does God know him, but he knows all about him – when he rises, when he sits, his thoughts, know what I will say before I speak. He reminds the readers that





he cannot begin to fathom the way that God is able to be all these things in his life. He says (v. 6), “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.” Well, David, some things are not meant for our understanding (just ask Job). God is all powerful and can do all things.

An Omnipresent God (Psalm 139:7-12): As children, many of us played the outdoor game, Hide and Seek. We chose someone to be “it” and they were to cover their eyes and count while we hid. The last one to be discovered was the winner of the game. The psalmist, David, reminds us that there is no place to hide from an omnipresent God because He is everywhere and sees everything – both hidden and revealed. Trapped in a bad game of Hide and Seek, he asks the questions: “Where can I go from Your spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” If I ascend to heaven, You are there; to Sheol [hell], You are there; take wings and fly, You are there; to the deepest water, You are there. But here’s the blessing in having an omnipresent God, “even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (NRSV). What a blessing it is to know that wherever we are, God is there!

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1.) Invite the learners to name someone who has loved and accepted them just as they are. How is this similar to the way the psalm talks about God knowing us? 2.) Compare the psalmist’s conviction that God knows persons intimately with the learners’ experiences of God. Make sure you have created a safe space for this discussion. 3.) Wonder together on what kind of spiritual practice could cultivate an intimate and trusting relationship with God. How does Psalm 139 inspire you to worship God?

iTHINK: (5–7 min.)

1. Reflect on what Psalm 139 means for you and your relationship with God. Select your personal theme song based on your reflection.
2. Our gifts and talents are clues to God’s calling on our lives. Reflect on how well you are fulfilling your calling.
3. Look in the mirror and cherish all parts of yourself.

KEY VERSE: O Lord, you have searched me and known me. Psalm 139:1

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
6. You shalt not kill.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Published quarterly for \$3.50 per copy by The A.M.E. Zion Publishing House,
3225 West Sugar Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28269.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: The Young People-Adult Quarterly,
Post Office Box 26770, Charlotte, NC 28221-6770. Lessons and/or Readings are
based on the Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching,
Copyright © 2015, National Council of Churches, Used by permission.

All rights reserved. (USPS 697-000)