The Shepherd’s Crucible

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
▶ Decipher God’s answer to the question “Why does God allow pain and suffering?”
▶ Understand the importance of the Shepherd knowing His sheep and of trusting Him.
▶ Delve deeper into the concept of the righteous living by their faith (Hab. 2:4, NLT).

Preparing to Lead
Evil is senseless, and many ask why a loving, all-powerful God allows the ones He created to suffer. After Habakkuk shares this complaint with God, He receives an interesting answer. In Habakkuk 2:2, the Lord emphasizes His point by saying, “‘Write my answer in large, clear letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell everyone else’” (NLT). Then He states in verse 4 that “‘the righteous will live by their faith’” (NLT). Faith is developed within the boundaries of a relationship. We can live by faith only if we have a relationship with Jesus.

Getting Started
A. Historian Mark Brimsley writes of the United States Civil War leader Stonewall Jackson: “His apparent obliviousness to danger attracted notice, and after the first Manassas battle someone asked him how he managed it. ‘My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed,’ Jackson explained. ‘God knows the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter where it may overtake me.’”

Ask: How does Jackson’s calm demeanor illustrate that “the righteous will live by their faith”? How would your faith in God help if you were a hostage amidst terrorists?

B. Form two teams, and use a whiteboard or flipchart for a game similar to Pictionary. One person draws a picture while their team tries to guess what it is. Give everyone a chance to draw. Here are the pictures to be drawn: a shepherd; a feast; the house of the Lord; oil; a shepherd’s rod; a guide; green pastures; a cup running over; sheep; the Valley of the Shadow of Death; fear; an enemy; protection; love; trust in God.

Then read Psalm 23. Discuss the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Ask: What do your observations illustrate about our relationship with Jesus?
Delving into the Word

A. Divide into four groups. Allow at least 15 minutes for this activity. Each group will work together to write down the characteristics that identify and illustrate the faith of one of the following Bible heroes. Give each group pens and paper to record their thoughts. ●Esther—Esther 4 ●Job—Job 10:40–42 ●Elijah—2 Kings 1 ●Solomon—2 Chronicles 1 ●Mary, the mother of Jesus—Luke 26–56.

Ask each group to share a brief report about the faith of their hero, especially pointing out anything new they have learned.

B. Give the following 10 verses to volunteers, along with an unlit candle. Demonstrate the fire of faith that began in the hearts of Adam and Eve, and that still burns within our hearts today. Ask the 10 readers to look up their verses, then stand. Light the candle of the first reader, and after each person finishes reading, have that person light the candle of the next reader. Continue this display of faith until all the verses have been read and all the candles lit. ●What is faith?—Heb. 11:1–3 ●Abel—Heb. 11:4 ●Enoch—Heb 11:5, 6 ●Noah—Heb. 11:7 ●Abraham—Heb. 11:8–10 ●Moses—Heb. 11:24–28 ●the Israelites—Heb.11:29, 30 ●Rahab—Heb. 11:31 ●Untold others—Heb. 11:32–38 ●Today’s faithful—Heb. 11:39–12:4.

Discuss how faith is like fire. Ask: Where do you see evidence that the torch of Christian faith is being passed into the world today? ●What can we do to insure that the flame burns brightly in our families and the surrounding community?

Discussing the Ideas

1. Why does God allow pain and suffering?
2. How did faith help Job when he lost everything and experienced excruciating physical pain?
3. Proverbs 17:3 says that fire “tests the purity of silver and gold, but the Lord tests the heart” (NLT). How does fire illustrate the strengthening of our faith?
4. What does it mean that “the righteous will live by their faith”?
5. Discuss some personal examples of how trials or pain can make faith stronger.
6. Our faith grows in proportion to the depth of our relationship with God. Discuss the building blocks of a relationship with God.
7. How does faith bridge the gap between the known and the unknown? (See Hebrews 11:1.) Give some specific examples.

Closing the Activity

Do the reproducible activity on page 31. Then close with prayer.

Debbie Battin Sasser, Friendswood, Texas, U.S.A.
Faith Is . . .

Let’s take a look at the evidence of faith in the world around us. Respond to the following questions. Be prepared to share your answers with the rest of the class.

1. Think of three people who have helped your faith grow throughout your childhood, your adolescence, and your current life. What are their names and the characteristic you admire most about each one?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

2. List three heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 who inspire you, and why they do so.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

3. Use Hebrews 12 to answer the following questions:

   a. Summarize verse 1 in your own words.

       ____________________________________________________________

       ____________________________________________________________

   b. According to verse 2, how are we able to run with endurance?

       ____________________________________________________________

   c. What do verses 14 and 15 say about how we should be living?

       ____________________________________________________________

       ____________________________________________________________


______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
The Crucibles That Come

Surveying the Source
Jer. 9:7–16; Rom. 1:21–32; 2 Cor. 12:7–12; 1 Pet. 4:12–19; 5:8–11.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
- Analyze the problem of sin and suffering and understand that sin and human-made conditions have a lot to do with the world’s tragic outcomes.
- Reaffirm a commitment to God through the examples of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and other biblical characters who endured trials.
- Understand the applications of perseverance and determination in the Christian struggle in order to prepare one’s self against Satan.

Preparing to Lead
At first glance, the question “Why do good people have to suffer?” doesn’t have an easy answer. In fact, even most practicing Christians don’t want to tackle that query with a skeptic. However, God has nothing to hide from humanity, and the reason He created a world with free-will is because He is more than willing to answer all the tough questions and demonstrate His love. Nothing in the history of the universe can be tougher than Jesus’ walk through the painful path of suffering to the cross, the place where He paid the heavy price for all of our sins. For every drop of blood He shed, the just who suffer are redeemed.

Getting Started
A. Use the metaphor of a sports game. Ask: How many wins did you get this week? Explain that if life was a game, losing every once in a while would be inevitable. However, by keeping track of our wins, we can have a positive attitude and more subsequent successes. This will give students an opportunity to testify to all the good things that have happened to them throughout the week, such as acing an exam, completing a dreaded task, getting a promotion or a raise at work, etc. Add up all the wins in the room to see how successful your class is.

B. Begin by asking if anyone in class has ever broken a promise. Have the class analyze why it is so hard for humans to keep their promises. Ask why there are so many variables we cannot control. Then ask if God has ever broken a promise.

Delving Into the Word
A. In a PowerPoint presentation, project images of many tragic historical events. For example, images of September 11, 2001, Hurricane Katrina, dramatizations of the sinking of the Titanic and the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. You can find many of these images at www.images.google.com. After the slideshow, create a discussion by asking the following: How could God allow this to
in Him. Signing this commitment card signals our intent to commit our lives and hearts to the Lord. And we are saying that even though life can be tough, we have every intention of remaining true to God.

If you wish, hang the cards throughout the room.

Provide a commitment card for every member of the class (see page 32). Explain that based on the lesson, life isn’t likely to get any easier. In fact, it will probably become more difficult. That is why a commitment to God is crucial. Every day we can promise to trust more in Him. Signing this commitment card signals our intent to commit our lives and hearts to the Lord. And we are saying that even though life can be tough, we have every intention of remaining true to God.

If you wish, hang the cards throughout the room.

**Discussing the Ideas**

1. How would you explain to a five-year-old why there are natural disasters as well as human-made death in the world?
2. How can tragic events become an opportunity to share the gospel?
3. Describe one of the toughest events in your life and how your faith in God not only strengthened you but also how it grew because of this tribulation.
4. Imagine you are the apostle Paul or Peter. How did your personal relationship with Christ help you get through shipwrecks, arrests, beatings, and humiliations? Would you be willing to undergo all that in real life? Why? Why not?
5. What is your biggest fear? How can you overcome it?
6. How would you explain to an atheist why good people sometimes have to suffer?

**Closing the Activity**

Provide a commitment card for every member of the class (see page 32). Explain that based on the lesson, life isn’t likely to get any easier. In fact, it will probably become more difficult. That is why a commitment to God is crucial. Every day we can promise to trust more in Him. Signing this commitment card signals our intent to commit our lives and hearts to the Lord. And we are saying that even though life can be tough, we have every intention of remaining true to God.

If you wish, hang the cards throughout the room.

**Fabian Carbelo, Colton, California, U.S.A.**
I, __________________________, fully understand that life is extremely difficult at times. I am also aware that the enemy of God is waging a full-fledged war on God’s people. However, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I promise to stay strong and never give up, for I know that Jesus persevered.

Sincerely, ____________________
(sign)

Date ______________

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The Birdcage

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Explore the truth that God will sometimes lead us into crucibles of faith.
► Discover how to know if the Lord is leading when we experience trials.
► Determine how we are to overcome when faced with trying experiences.

Preventing to Lead
The only thing they could do was stand. The Lord had led them to this place, and there was nowhere else for them to turn and nothing they could do to save themselves. Why had God brought them here? Surrounded by a daunting wilderness, facing a vast ocean, and pursued by Egyptian forces, they cried out to Moses, the Lord’s appointed spokesman. And his response to them was, “‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today’” (Exod. 14:13, NKJV).

Getting Started
A. Tell the class: If you are willing to follow wherever God leads, raise your hand. Keep you hand up high as I read the following list of places where He may lead you. If I get to a place where you are not willing to go, lower you hand. Here then are the places: conflict, loneliness, pain, grief, disease, loss of loved ones, poverty, prison.

Ask: Where He leads me I will follow, but will I follow if He leads me into a crucible—a place where I may experience difficulties I don’t want to experience? Will you follow wherever He leads?

B. Bring a small candle and a lighter or matches to class. Hold the candle up and light it. Then ask for a volunteer to come up and hold their finger in the fire as you count slowly to 20. Most likely, you won’t get any volunteers. Then say: This week’s lesson focuses on the difficult experiences we must face in this life—the crucibles into which the Lord often leads us. And sometimes it seems as though He leads us right into the fire. Are you willing to follow where He leads?

Delving Into the Word
A. Say to the class: There are several accounts of people in the Bible who faced dire circumstances in their lives. In many cases they were God-fearing individuals who were guided by the Lord. As we read their stories, we can see how and why they were led through each of their unique experiences. In the same way, God leads us today. We are often faced with trials that He purposely carries us through.
apply 1 Peter 4:12 and 13 to the trials you may be facing now, or to the trials that are to come.

Have someone read 1 Peter 4:12, 13. Say: If you are Christ’s disciple, you will suffer, just as He suffered. Believing that you are one of His children, determine to

Discussing the Ideas

1. Is it possible to live a Christian life free of suffering? Why, or why not?
2. If an individual has not experienced any real suffering or trials in life, is that person truly a Christian? Explain your answer.
3. Can you think of a Bible passage or a song that you did not fully understand until you had a trial to which you could apply that verse or song? Share your experience with the class.

Closing the Activity

Tresa Beard, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
Questionnaire

Think of the last time you suffered or went through a trying experience. Do you believe God led you into that trial? Explain.

Do you believe God leads us into crucibles or times of difficulty? Why or why not?

If (or when) you have caused your own suffering or painful experience, will (did) the Lord still lead you through that trial? Give reasons for your answer.
Lesson 4

October 27, 2007

Seeing the Silversmith’s Face

Surveying the Source

Job 23:1–10; Dan. 12:1–10; Matt. 5:16; 25:1–12; 1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 4:11–16.

Plotting the Course

The students will:

► Identify Bible characters who went through times of testing.
► Explore the benefits that can be obtained through trials and suffering.

Preparing to Lead

Most Christians do not view the refining process as a positive experience. While we are eager to partake of God’s blessings, we shrink from trials and adversity—even when we know they are often God’s most effective ways to draw us closer to Him.

Getting Started

A. New Years is only a few months away. Ask the class members to each share a goal he or she would like to accomplish during 2008 and then tell why they feel that goal is important. When they are done, ask:

● Why didn’t anyone mention going through a trial as a goal?
● Why do we avoid trials, when we know they strengthen our characters and our relationship with God?

B. Say to the class: Imagine turning on the television and hearing the following infomercial: “Do you find yourself constantly falling into temptation? Are you tired of being a Christian in name only? Do you long to feel closer to God, to live a holier life, and to face any trial with courage? If so, then call now, and we’ll rush you instructions on how you can be an overcomer. For only six easy payments of $25.00 each, you too can learn how to enjoy suffering and trials.” Who wouldn’t jump at the chance for such an offer? But when we realize that the price is submission to the Refiner’s fire, we are tempted to look for an easier route to character refinement. Let’s discuss for a few minutes why that is.

Delving Into the Word

A. Have the class turn to Hebrews 11. Tell them that the Scottish theologian James S. Stewart said, “It is the world’s greatest sufferers who have produced the most shining examples of unconquerable faith.” Read through Hebrews 11, and identify individuals who suffered greatly. Discuss what they went through and why their faith remained strong. Have the class name other Bible characters who went through trials and came out better persons because of their experience.

Materials

flipchart/whiteboard and the appropriate markers; paper, pencils, markers, and/or Play-Doh©
that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from the thornpricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of his.”

Conclude with a prayer of thanks for what Jesus did to provide our salvation, and for what He is doing to perfect our characters so we can be more like Him.

Discussing the Ideas

1. J. C. Penney, the man who began the chain of department stores which carry his name, once said, “I would have never amounted to anything were it not for adversity.” Is Penney’s experience the rule or the exception? Why, or why not?

2. What are the positive benefits of trials and suffering? Look up the following verses and write the answers on the whiteboard/flipchart: Matt. 5:16; Rom. 5:3–5; 1 Cor. 4:9; Phil. 3:8; Hebrews 5.

3. Discuss the following statement: “The greatest Christians in history seem to say that their sufferings ended up bringing them the closest to God—so this is the best thing that could happen, not the worst.”

4. Hand out copies of “The Bear and the Hunter” (p. 34) to each class member, along with pencils, markers, or Play-Doh®. After the story is read, have everyone respond to the activity at the end of the story.

5. If a friend began doubting God because of the trials he or she was experiencing, how would you respond?

Closing the Activity

Read the following to the class: British pastor John Stott believes that suffering is “the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith.” But he also realizes that when we put our suffering in light of what Jesus went through for us, we can see it a completely different way.

“I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the state of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But after awhile I had to turn away. And in my imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from the thornpricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of his.”

Conclude with a prayer of thanks for what Jesus did to provide our salvation, and for what He is doing to perfect our characters so we can be more like Him.

2. Ibid., p. 54.
3. Ibid., p. 74.
4. Ibid., pp. 74, 75.
The Bear and the Hunter

Peter Kreeft, author of *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, presents the following situation to illustrate how easy it is for us to misunderstand God when we’re going through the refining process:

“Imagine a bear in a trap and a hunter who, out of sympathy, wants to liberate him. He tries to win the bear’s confidence, but he can’t do it, so he has to shoot the bear full of drugs. The bear, however, thinks this is an attack and that the hunter is trying to kill him. He doesn’t realize that this is being done out of compassion.

“Then, in order to get the bear out of the trap, the hunter has to push him further into the trap to release the tension on the spring. If the bear were semiconscious at that point, he would be even more convinced that the hunter was his enemy who was out to cause him suffering and pain. But the bear would be wrong. He reaches this incorrect conclusion because he’s not a human being.

“Now, how can anyone be certain that’s not an analogy between us and God? I believe God does the same to us sometimes, and we can’t comprehend why he does it any more than the bear can understand the motivations of the hunter. As the bear could have trusted the hunter, so we can trust God.”

Think back on your life to a time when you were in a “bear trap” situation, where God or another human being (dentist, doctor, counselor, coach, teacher, parent, police officer)—put you through an experience that was painful at the time, but for which you are thankful today. Draw on the back of this sheet or sculpt with Play-Doh® something that illustrates this event, and be ready to share your artwork and your experience with the class.

Extreme Heat

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Show how God leads individuals or groups through trying circumstances.
► Evaluate what it takes to “get through” suffering and trials.
► Demonstrate how trials and hardships can be used to build character.

Preparing to Lead
Envy, contriving, and God’s desire to “try us as gold” are some of the reasons we endure hardships and trials similar to those of Bible characters, persons in ancient history, and modern martyrs. The Bible records both the trials and God’s leading to help us see that He is with us, and for us to understand that human beings will have varying reactions to the challenges they encounter.

Getting Started
A. Arrange for church members or other people you know who have endured trials to share their experiences with your class. (Choose people from varying age levels, etc.) Give index cards and pens or pencils to the students so they can document the guests’ responses to their difficulties and what measures they used to deal with them.

B. Separate the class into approximately three groups, and divide current newspapers and magazines between the groups. Give each class member a copy of the reproducible action sheet on page 35. Then instruct them to find articles that feature events which caused suffering and trials for individuals or groups of people (for example: missing/kidnapped children; the loss of property through fire or flood; accidents; unfair treatment because of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.).

Tell them to find and read two stories and to record on their action sheets the events that occurred, how the people reacted, and suggested measures to resolve the conflict.

After about 10 minutes, have the class reconvene as a whole to discuss their action sheets.

Delving Into the Word
A. Discuss why Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were able to withstand being taken captive and were not influenced to partake of the lifestyle of...
their captors.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, most likely faced ridicule when she became pregnant before she was married. At that time, when this happened to a woman, she could even be stoned. Discuss how Mary was able to accept God’s will for her life.

Also discuss how such people as Hannah (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11), Joseph (Genesis 37, 39–42), Job (Job 1:6–2:10, 42:1–16), Hosea (Hos. 1:2, 3), etc., were able to suffer trials successfully. In each case, use evidence from the Bible. As your class discusses each of these people, write that person’s name on the flipchart or whiteboard, and underneath each name, record class responses. When finished, have the class notice and discuss any patterns that emerged. Ask: How can these patterns apply to modern trials and suffering?

B. Using concordances, have class members do word searches of instances in the Bible where persons had challenges or when disaster struck. (Examples of words to search include tears, sorrow, leprosy, war, famine, crying, etc.) Give them about 10–15 minutes to conduct their searches. Then on a flip-chart or whiteboard, list the people or event they chose, how the people responded to the trial they faced, and God’s answers to the problem.

Discuss how these answers can be applied to specific problems we face.

**Discussing the Ideas**

1. If you had to answer for your faith like Daniel or Job, what strategies would you use to share your beliefs?
2. When God told Hosea to marry a prostitute, Hosea obeyed. How would you know if it was God telling you to do something that seemed to go against His principles?
3. What examples can you give of hardships that try your faith?

5. “‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation’” (Matt. 26:41, NIV). How do you relate this text to the temptations with which you have been faced or are currently facing?
6. Are modern-day trials more difficult to overcome than those of years gone by? Justify your answer.
7. Why are troubles and trials necessary for character development?

**Closing the Activity**

Say: In order to temper steel, or remove the dross from precious metals, the workman must hold the metal in the center of the fire. Then the metal is hammered and plunged into cold water. All this to make it strong and useful! Likewise, God uses trials to make us strong in order that we can work successfully for Him.

Have someone read Malachi 3:2 and 1 Peter 1:7. Close with a prayer that you and all of your class members will, through the Holy Spirit’s help, remain close to God during any suffering or trial that comes your way.

**Beverly Henry, Mandeville, Jamaica, West Indies**
## Action Sheet

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<th>Story 1</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>How Resolved</th>
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<tr>
<th>Story 2</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>How Resolved</th>
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Struggling With all Energy

Surveying the Source
Genesis 32.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Examine the relationship between adversity and spiritual growth.
► Consider Jesus’ suffering for our sake.
► Recognize that the Holy Spirit is the Difference-Maker in our spiritual lives.

Preparing to Lead
Have you ever encountered adversity so great that you knew you were facing certain failure? My friend Richard urgently needed to cross a large lake in his small boat; but with extreme headwinds, he knew his tiny craft would be driven backward. While his preference was to tie up in a safe place and wait, circumstances required him to attempt the impossible. Jacob similarly prepared to meet Esau “in great fear and distress” (Gen. 32:7, NIV), and on the way, he met face to face with God. Will you allow adversity to make you “strong, firm, and steadfast”? (1 Pet. 5:10, NIV).

Getting Started
A. Say: Long before Hollywood came up with the storyline of the underdog who overcomes insurmountable odds to win in the end, the Bible told the story of Joseph and his perseverance through adversity to save an entire nation from starvation.

Next, read portions of Joseph’s story from Genesis 37 and 39, and ask the class for other examples of individuals who have overcome adversity. These can be biblical or otherwise. Write these examples on a whiteboard/flipchart.

Ask: ● What elements do these examples have in common? ● Did each person grow from their success? Or did they soon forget their lowly beginnings?

B. Ask the class to share the last time they depended on someone else for something they needed. Examples might include having someone provide transportation when they didn’t have a car or counting on someone to keep a promise.

Discuss: ● If that other person hadn’t performed, how would it have affected you? ● Did your reliance on them have a vulnerability component? Explain.
● What part did trust play in your relationship with this person, and why? ● Is there something you had to do to get them to commit to do what you needed? If so, what was it?

Delving Into the Word
A. Read Genesis 32:1–31 aloud with class members taking turns, verse by verse. Then, using the whiteboard/flipchart, outline the different compo-
nents of the chapter. Your outline might look like this: ●1–8/Jacob learns that
Esau is coming to meet him. ●9–12/Jacob prays for deliverance. ●13–21/Jacob pre-
ares for the worst. ●22–31/Jacob wrestles with God.

Discuss the following: ●If you saw angels like Jacob did, what would it do for
your spiritual life? With such a visible manifestation of God’s presence, why
was Jacob so traumatized over meeting Esau? ●What does Jacob mean when he
prays “I am unworthy” (NIV)? Is there any evidence that he was reassured after
his prayer? ●From verses 13–21, one might infer that Jacob sent his servants
ahead to “take the first hit.” Isn’t this inconsistent with believing that God would
deliver him? Does the fact that he continued to prepare to meet Esau after his
prayer demonstrate that he had no faith? Explain your answers. ●The chapter ends
with Jacob’s flesh-to-flesh encounter with God. Does God still walk the earth?
Why or why not?
B. Say: Testing, trying, examining, refining—the Bible has a lot to say about
belief in God give us hope? (See 2 Corinthians 4:17.)

5. This lesson has focused on Jacob’s emotions and experiences when he was
confronted with meeting Esau, his estranged brother. Yet from Genesis
33:1–9, it appears that Esau missed Jacob. Is Jacob guilty of making invalid
assumptions? Explain. Is it possible that we create crises in our lives that are not
based on fact? How do we prevent this? Can you think of any passages of Scrip-
ture that may apply?

Closing the Activity

Do the reproducible activity on page 36. Have each class member answer the
questions, and then allow them to share the answers with the rest of the class if
they so choose. Do the activity yourself, and be the first one to share.

Tom Macomber, Riverside, California, U.S.A.
• Responding to Adversity •

What is the most overwhelming obstacle you have overcome?

Did you remember to ask God for help?

What ultimately happened?

In light of Jacob’s experience, if confronted with a similar adversity today, how would you respond and why?
Indestructible Hope

Surveying the Source

Job 4, 5, 38–41; Isa. 41:8–14; Jer. 29:1–10; Romans 5; Hebrews 11, 12.

Plotting the Course

The students will:

► Differentiate between a worldly hope and a spiritual hope.
► Compare and contrast how hope is used throughout the Bible.
► Commit to developing a “living” hope in their Christian walk.

Preparing to Lead

Every society comes with its own sayings regarding its idea of hope. Without hope, there is little will to continue living. Society continually searches for symbols of hope. Whether it exists in books or movies with heroes flying in red capes, or in the hearts of people waiting for something better, a longing exists for a beautiful future. The beauty for Christians is that we don’t have to wonder. We look toward the cross not only for our salvation but also for our hope.

Getting Started

A. Conduct an Internet search for hope quotations, and print several out for the class. Keeping the identity of the author secret at first, use the quotations as an icebreaker for a discussion of hope. Have the students evaluate the validity of each quotation, and from what perspective the writer is coming. Identify the author, and then see if that makes a difference in how the class interprets each quotation.

B. Divide the class into groups, and provide them with pen and paper. Each group should write down an acrostic using the letters H-O-P-E to poetically define the word. After each group has completed their acrostic, have them share it with the group at large. A short discussion could include their viewpoints on what hope means to them and to society in general.

Delving Into the Word

A. Divide the class into groups, and assign them the following “compare and contrast” verses regarding aspects of hope. Guide discussions so that they analyze how the texts are similar and how they are different. The groups also should consider how the context of the verse implies meaning and how the cultural setting might influence the connotation of the word hope. After the groups discuss their verses, have each group present their analysis to the entire class. Encourage creativity in the presentations. Here then are the verses:

- Ruth 1:11–13 versus Job 5:15–17
- Job 4:5–7 versus Job 8:12–14
- Heb. 11:1–3 versus Ps. 65:4–6
- Prov. 24:13–15 versus 1 Thess. 4:13, 14
Discussing the Ideas

1. What is the difference between true hope and false hope? Is there such a thing as false hope for Christians? Why, or why not?
2. Describe the relationship between hope and the Holy Spirit.
3. How are we able to have hope during sufferings?
4. Which is more likely to focus our mind on Christ—when we are in a time of trial or when our lives are trouble free?
5. Can a Christian’s hope be truly unshakable? Why, or why not?
6. What happens when we let ourselves lose hope?
7. How do we reflect hope in our lives so others may see it?

Closing the Activity

Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:3, or write the text on the whiteboard or flipchart. Lead the students in deciding how they can realize a living hope in their lives by asking the following questions:

- What does it mean to have a living hope?
- How is a living hope achieved in our lives?
- How can we show a living hope to others?

After a short discussion, have the students share in twos and threes their commitment to living and sharing a life of hope. Close with group prayer. Or for a more intimate setting, have the small groups close with individual prayer.

Jeff Rogers, Carmichael, California, U.S.A.
Radio Script
Select a member of your group for each of the jobs listed below. Then work together to produce a radio script about indestructible hope to perform for the class. You can use the sample script (also below) to help you with ideas for your script.

Playwright
The playwright writes the actual script. The other members of the group provide input. But the playwright is responsible for putting the words on the paper.

Foley Artist
The Foley artist creates the sound effects for the script and is responsible for collecting all props and using them during the presentation. The Foley artist insures the sound effects are included in the script.

Advertising Executive
The advertising executive writes the commercials for the radio script. This person decides where the commercials should be placed in the script and informs the playwright of these decisions.

Sample Radio Script for a Newscast

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Seeing the Invisible

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Explore the idea of seeing the world through eyes of faith.
► Recognize how God leads and cares for us no matter what we face.
► Discover how to get in tune with God’s Spirit.

Preparing to Lead
We celebrate risk in today’s world—but we value safety, especially as Christians. Christian radio stations advertise themselves as “safe for the whole family.” An Adventist college promoted itself as “spiritually safe.” We buy cars with air bags and put our children in car seats. Yet pain and struggling—physically, emotionally, and yes, spiritually—is inevitable. Nobody gets a free pass to Happyville. Everyone experiences hurt and frustration with life and with God. This week’s lesson explores how people can face life’s trials with both honesty and abiding faith.

Getting Started
A. Tell the class about the highs, lows, and perplexities of your own spiritual journey. Or invite someone with a remarkable journey of faith to come and share. Highlight times when God seemed near, far, or even irrelevant, and what you or the other person learned along the way. Tell how faith has made a difference, and what was learned about God. Invite class members to share their thoughts and experiences.

B. Ask class members to share ways God speaks to them (through friends and family, through media, through nature, through life, through the Holy Spirit, etc.).

Delving Into the Word
A. Have a class member read John 20:24–29. Then explore what the story of “doubting” Thomas teaches us about seeing through eyes of faith.

Materials
pens; Bibles; blank note cards
Say: The book of John was written to a generation who did not know Jesus personally. In contrast to the other Gospels, all the miracles in the book of John take place at some distance, with no physical contact with Christ necessary. John again and again emphasizes the primacy and power of faith in Jesus, even when He seems far away. Jesus declared to His disciples, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” What does this mean to us to as people who, like John’s original readers, have never known Jesus personally and must accept Him and believe in Him based on someone else’s testimony?

Next, have a class member read 1 Corinthians 13:11, 12.

Ask: What meanings might we have missed in these well-known and well-worn verses?

Have someone read John 14:1–14. Note Philip and Thomas’s questions and the answers Jesus gave. Note that verses 15–27 talk about the Holy Spirit, the Comforter—our greatest aid in growing and maintaining faith.

Have a class member read verses 26 and 27.

Ask: How can we plug into the Holy Spirit? How can we embrace Jesus’ words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”?

B. Read through Hebrews 11 as a class, and have your class members take notes about the attributes of faith-spurred people. Discuss what motivated these people and what set them apart, and how we might emulate their attitudes.


Ask: ●What in these verses is encouraging to believers? ●What is challenging?

Do the reproducible activity on page 38. Discuss how class members rated each item and why.

**Discussing the Ideas**

1. Some Christians preach a “prosperity gospel” which promises a wealth of physical blessings if people will just step out in faith—usually by contributing money to the right ministry. What biblical evidence is there against this?

2. What can be the biggest challenges to faith? Explain why it might or might not be easier to trust God with some “big” things rather than with some of life’s “paper cuts.”

3. How should the risk Jesus took to save us shape our perspective on life’s trials?

4. The Bible describes the community of believers as the “body of Christ.” What does this teach us about how we should aid each other when we face problems?

5. An overly comfortable life can detract from our dependence on God. How can we keep our focus on Him even when life is running smoothly?

6. When life is going well, how can we prepare ourselves spiritually for the inevitable hard times ahead?

7. What personal qualities do those who thrive through trials all share?

**Closing the Activity**

Pass out note cards. Challenge class members to explore with a Bible, on their own time, how they might step forward in faith to enrich their own spiritual lives.

Tell them to write on the card in class one thing today that they’d like to do for God that would involve some risk. This might be something they’ve never tried, something they’ve always longed for but never arrived at, or something that truly stretches their character. Tell them to write down one promise from the verses studied today that they will claim as their own. They need not share what they’ve written unless they personally desire to, but should take them home with them.

Tompaul Wheeler, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A.
On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the biggest, how much risk would you personally feel in the following actions?

1. _____ Telling a family member about your faith.
2. _____ Telling a stranger on an airplane about your faith.
3. _____ Trusting God to take care of your finances.
4. _____ Trusting God to take care of your family members.
5. _____ Speaking out when a person hurts someone you care about.
6. _____ Speaking out when you feel God has been misrepresented.
7. _____ Risking your health and safety to serve God in an unsettled country.
8. _____ Letting everyday problems crowd out your devotional time.
9. _____ Broaching reconciliation with someone you’ve never gotten along with.
10. _____ Apologizing first.

Lesson 8

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A Life of Praise

Surveying the Source
Josh. 5:13–6:20; 2 Chron. 20:1–30; Ps. 100:4; 134:1, 2; 145; Acts 16:16–34; Phil. 4:4–7.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Research Bible examples of praise and/or teaching about praise.
► Realize the personal benefits associated with praising God.
► Praise God in an active and creative way.

Preparing to Lead
Praising God is a biblical imperative. We are commanded to praise God not because He has some insecure need to hear us reiterate His good points, but because praise allows Him to transform our perspective. Praise means focusing on who God is—not just on “what have You done for me lately?” If we are willing to take our eyes off our own problems and direct them to Him, God has entire storehouses of blessings for us we might otherwise never notice or experience.

Getting Started
A. Ask for a volunteer from the class. Have that person select two other people, one who knows the volunteer well, and one who does not. Ask each of those two to think of something to praise, compliment, or affirm about the original volunteer. Repeat this activity if time allows. Discuss the differences and similarities between the praise of someone who knows you well and someone who does not.
Ask: How does getting to know God better affect the ways we praise Him?
B. Have someone read the following passages aloud: Psalm 34:1, Psalm 113:3, Philippians 4:4.

Discuss the following statement: At any given moment, I have an infinite number of reasons to praise God. On a whiteboard/flipchart (or LCD projector) write the phrase “God is a God who...” Invite the group to finish the sentence using alliterative phrases (repetition of the same letter or sound), such as: guards galaxies; supervises solar systems; watches worlds; redeems reprobates; manages microbes; excites electrons, etc.

Delving Into the Word
A. Divide the class into four groups, and assign one of the following texts to each group: Job 26, Psalm 34, Jonah 2, and Luke 1:26–55. Have each group read over their assigned text, then discuss the following question. (Have the questions
written out on the flipchart/whiteboard or LCD projector.) When each group has finished, have them share their answers with the entire class. ● At what point in this person’s experience were they praising God? ● Had He already accomplished the things for which they were praising? ● How were their circumstances and/or outlook altered by this prayer of praise? ● What was God’s response to each person? ● What experiences in life can we compare to each of these situations? ● What would it take to praise God as Job, David, Jonah, and Mary did?  

B. Read Psalm 22:3 aloud from several different translations, and discuss what it means. Brainstorm a list of synonyms for praise (exalt, extol, magnify, etc.). Look up each one in a concordance, preferably an edition that gives some information about the original language such as Young’s Analytical Concordance. Notice which terms are used most often. Use the concordance to help find the Bible’s answers to each of these questions: ● Who should praise God? ● How should they praise God? ● Why should they praise God? ● When and where should they praise God?  

Discussing the Ideas  

1. How is expressing praise different from expressing gratitude? How does someone’s reaction differ when we praise or thank them?  
2. Why should the Christian life truly be “a life of praise”?  
3. What health benefits might be associated with praising God?  
4. How can we praise God while driving? working? studying? socializing?  
5. Why is our praise—especially when offered amidst difficulty—so valuable to God?  
6. How can praising God change our perspective and our attitude?  
7. How does praise help us to know God better?  

Closing the Activity  

Have someone read Psalm 150 aloud, preferably from a modern translation or a paraphrase such as The Message. Share with the group the hymn “Earth and All Stars” (see page 39). If possible, have the class learn the tune and sing it with accompaniment, or listen to a recording. If your group is not musically inclined, have various people read the different verses expressively. Add verses of your own if time permits.  

Sharon E. Wright, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
Earth and All Stars

1. Earth and all stars! Loud rushing planets! Sing to the Lord a new song!
2. Hall, wind, and rain! Loud blowing snowstorm! Sing to the Lord a new song!
3. Trumpet and pipe! Loud clashing cymbals! Sing to the Lord a new song!
4. Engines and steel! Loud pounding hammer! Sing to the Lord a new song!

Lord a new song! Oh, victory! Loud shouting
Lord a new song! Flowers and trees! Loud rustling
Lord a new song! Harp, lute, and lyre! Loud humming
Lord a new song! Limestone and beams! Loud building

5. Classrooms and lab! Loud boiling test tubes! Sing to the Lord a new song!
6. Sing to the Lord a new song! Athlete and band!
7. Sing to the Lord a new song! People singing!

Children of God,
Dying and rising,
Sing to the Lord a new song!
Heaven and earth,
Hosts everlasting,
Sing to the Lord a new song!

He has done marvelous things.
I too will praise him with a new song!

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Lesson 9

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Meekness in the Crucible

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Understand the difference between being meek and being a doormat.
► Discover that meekness is really strength.
► Determine to strive for meekness in their daily life.

Preparing to Lead
Meekness is not a sought-after quality in our power hungry world. Yet Jesus listed it among the most valued spiritual traits. It shouldn’t surprise Christians that this is so. Much of Christianity is a paradox: the first will be last (Mark 9:35), the master will serve (John 13:14), a child shall lead (Isa. 11:6), give and you shall receive (Luke 4:38). The world does not value these truths, because the world is centered on self while the Christian is centered on Christ. It is this center which give Christians the great strength to be meek.

Getting Started
A. In Matthew 20:16 Jesus tells us, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” Let’s demonstrate this principle. (Place one less candy than you have students on a table. Keep the remainder of the candy hidden. Assign each student a number, and ask them to come up in numerical order to take one candy. When the last student comes forward, the candy will be gone.)

Say: In the same way Jesus rewards those who are last today, we are going to reward the last student.
Then hand this student the rest of the candy you had set aside.

B. Present this scenario: A customer where you work complains to your boss about a situation in which you seem to be the party at fault. However, it was an associate whose negligence led to the complaint. Discuss several ways a meek person could respond in this situation using the following questions: ● What elements of each response would be meek, and which would be weak? ● Would you choose to respond differently if you knew that later on you would be vindicated? ● What if “later on” didn’t happen until heaven? Would your response change or stay the same?

Delving Into the Word
A. Give the students the following instructions: Use your Bibles and concordances to find Bible verses that deal with meekness. Write out these verses on these slips of paper. On other slips of paper, write prayers requesting the gift of meek-

Materials
whiteboard/flipchart; cotton balls; index cards; pens; scissors; glue sticks; slips of paper (at least 10 per student); bag of candy (enough so each student can have one and one student can have 15–20); Bibles; concordances

December 8, 2007

Lesson 10

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where you will see it often. The cotton balls, which are similar to sheep wool, can be a tangible reminder to ask the Lamb of God for meekness during your weak moments. Put them in each of the places where you are most tempted to act without meekness.

Next, give each student a copy of the reproducible activity (p. 40). Have them cut out and create an envelope, then place their slips of paper inside.

Say: Keep your slips of papers in the envelope where you can regularly take one out to remind, encourage, and exhort you to develop meekness.

B. Say: We tend to think of meek people as being doormats, but true meekness requires great strength.

Then on a whiteboard, list people in the Bible who were known for their meekness. Ask for instances during which each asserted themselves. Discuss in what ways each instance did or did not display true meekness.

Ask: If someone today were to display such strength, would we say they were meek? Why or why not?

On the other side of the board, list character traits we attribute to meek people. Then list character traits the Bible attributes to meekness.

Ask: In what ways does our view of meekness need to change?

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On the other side of the board, list character traits we attribute to meek people. Then list character traits the Bible attributes to meekness.

Ask: In what ways does our view of meekness need to change?

Discussing the Ideas

1. Explain how meekness is really strength.
2. How can we cultivate meekness?
3. You’re in a hurry, waiting in line at the grocery store when someone cuts in front of you. How do you respond in a meek way? Would your response change if you weren’t in a hurry? Why, or why not?
4. Think back to a time you didn’t respond in a meek way, and describe how you should have responded.
5. Name (or use initials if they are contemporaries) some people you consider to be meek, and explain why.
6. Why do you think Jesus said the meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5)?
7. If you were to list the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) in order of importance, where you would place meekness on the list, and why?
8. In what ways did Jesus exhibit meekness when He was on earth?

Closing the Activity

Say: It’s hard to be meek sometimes. Maybe your trouble spot is that daily traffic jam on the way to work, talking with difficult clients on the phone or in the cafeteria with friends. (Pass out index cards and cotton balls.) Write out Psalm 149:4 on your index card. Put the card where you will see it often. The cotton balls, which are similar to sheep wool, can be a tangible reminder to ask the Lamb of God for meekness during your weak moments. Put them in each of the places where you are most tempted to act without meekness.

Céleste Perrino-Walker, Rutland, Vermont, U.S.A.
“'Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth’”
(Matt. 5:5, NKJV).
Waiting in the Crucible

Surveying the Source
1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11; Rom. 5:3–5; 15:4, 5; Heb. 10:36.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Review the biblical definition of patience.
► Explore biblical stories of people who were patient and impatient for God’s will and the consequences they faced for their actions.
► Examine the patience of God for sinners.

Preparing to Lead
“You must learn in the school of Christ precious lessons of patience. Do not become discouraged, but keep at the work in all humility. It will drive you to Jesus; it will lead you to study the Pattern. You want to work as Jesus worked.

“Christ’s perfect example and the grace of God are given him to enable him to train his sons and daughters to be sons and daughters of God” (Sons and Daughters of God, p. 88).

Getting Started
A. Distribute paper and markers to each of the students. Ask them to illustrate an event in their lives which represents something they had to wait for. Ask them to share their illustrations and how they felt about having to wait. What made it easy or difficult to wait? Why? Was the wait worth it?

B. On a flipchart, write the following definitions of patient: 1. Having the quality of enduring evils without murmuring or fretfulness; sustaining afflictions of body or mind with fortitude, calmness or Christian submission to the divine will; as a patient person, or a person of patient temper. It is followed by the evil endured; as patient of labor or pain; patient of heat or cold. 2. Not easily provoked; calm under the sufferance of injuries or offenses; not revengeful (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary).

Ask the students to give you synonyms of the word patient. (If they can’t think of many, some examples are long-suffering, endurance, lenient, persevering, gentle, unhurried, unremitting, persistent.) Discuss how the definitions and synonyms can be applied to our lives as Christians and our witness to others.

Delving Into the Word
A. Distribute the handout “Waiting and Watching” (p. 41). Ask the students to find stories in the Bible of people who had to wait for God’s answer. Instruct them to list in the “Patient” column stories of people who waited and were patient and in the “Impatient” column, stories of people who were impatient. Also

Materials
flipchart/whiteboard; markers; paper; concordances; Bibles

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have them list the consequences for each story.

Next, ask the students to share the stories and the consequences the characters faced from either waiting or not waiting.

Ask: ● How did God respond? ● Did some of the people who didn’t wait have another chance? ● If so, did they learn from their impatience to be patient?

● How is trust a part of the equation of being patient?

B. Organize the class into groups, with each group having a concordance and a Bible. Ask them to find texts that speak about patience. Have them share the texts they have found. Ask which text is most meaningful to them and why. Discuss God’s patience and how it is evident in the history of the world.

On a flipchart, write the following quotation: “Make apparent to all your patience, your kindness, your long-suffering, gentleness, compassion and true goodness; for these graces are the expression of the character of the God whom you serve” (Evangelism, p. 400). Discuss what this quote tells us about the patience of God in our lives.

● How do we show these characteristics of God to those who we meet everyday?

● How do we apply this quote to our lives this coming week? month? year?

Discussing the Ideas

1. Why do humans find it so hard to be patient?

2. Paul describes patience as one of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Why do you think he did so?

3. As a Christian, how can we develop patience? What different types of patience are there? Why might some types of patience be more difficult to develop than others?


5. How can we learn to be patient as we wait for Christ’s return?

6. Is it easier for you to have patience with a Christian or with a person who doesn’t know Jesus? Explain.

7. As Christians, we are to reflect the character of God and Jesus. If patience is one of those characteristics, how important is it to develop genuine patience in all situations?

8. Why do you think God continues to be patient with a world full of sinners and the poor choices we make?

Closing the Activity

Say: Developing patience requires submission to God and His changing influence in our lives. By making a daily commitment to spend time building a relationship with Jesus, we will become better equipped to reflect His image to each person we meet.

Encourage the students to spend time this next week continuing to think about developing their fruit of the Spirit—patience.

As a commitment song, sing “Spirit Song,” No. 72 in He Is Our Song or Father, Lead Me Day by Day, No. 482 in The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal®.

Deena Bartel-Wagner, Spencerport, New York, U.S.A.
### Waiting and Watching

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Lesson 11

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Dying Like a Seed

Surveying the Source
1 Sam. 2:12–3:18; 13:1–14; Zech. 4:1–14; Rom. 12:1, 2; Phil. 2:5–9.

Plotting the Course
The students will:
 ► Gain potential to live productive lives.
 ► Recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the seed that can produce the best potential in a person’s life.

Preventing to Lead
Weightlifting was a fad for me for a few years. The exhausting exertion, sweat swamped body, pumped and aching muscles could only be endured for so long. When I hurt deep inside and could not lift another thing, my coach would say, “No pain, no gain.” Even when he was not there, this thought penetrated my head.

Getting Started
A. Take a lemon or a sunflower or a tomato (any piece of fruit with lots of seeds in it). Show it to the class and ask: “What do you see?” Expect the obvious and bizarre—from food to missile.
Tell them what you see—from the lemon an orchard or lemonade, from a sunflower a field of sunflowers or food for birds, from a tomato a salad or an entire garden plot of tomato plants.
Say: This reminds us that we do not always see the potential in things—including human beings. But if developed under the right conditions, fruit and humans have a great future. Also, for a piece of fruit to produce more fruit, the seed must be covered by fertile ground and die. Then it will re-grow in a new form. In the same way, we can be more effective in reaching our God-given potential if we die to self and let Jesus rule in our heart. Dying to self and letting Jesus rule in our heart are the fertile conditions for growth.
B. Show sand, rocks, soil, and soil with compost or manure in it to the class one item at a time.

Ask: ● Which “ground” is most likely to grow something? ● What would be needed for the other “ground” to grow something? ● What ingredients are needed in a person’s life to make a good environment for growth?”
Then tell them that God wants them to be like the chocolates that are altogether. However, it will cost them something to be that way. They have to surrender to God and let Him reproduce His character in them. If they are willing to allow God to change them and to help them grow—pay the cost—they can take a chocolate and pray silently for this to happen.

Put some chocolates or another type of sweet with one on its own in a basket and the remainder all together in another basket. 

Ask: • Which basket would you like to have—the one with many or the basket with just one? • Which basket would be the most expensive in terms of the chocolates, and why?

A. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Give each person in each group a copy of the reproducible activity on page 42. After each group has finished the activity, have them appoint a spokesperson to share what they discovered with the entire class about growing in Christ. Write their discoveries on a flipchart or whiteboard. Discuss any trends that the class sees after all the groups have reported.

B. Say: To have physical life and growth, you need a seed and fertile soil. To have spiritual growth, there must be a life-changing truth and a receptive heart. Without both, we cannot be transformed.

As a class, discuss the following sets of questions and their corresponding texts that you have written on the flipchart/whiteboard ahead of time. • What does the seed symbolize in Matthew 13:3–8, 18–23? What is the soil? • Based on the various soils (or types of hearts) in the parable in Matthew 13:3-8, 18–23, what must the seed (God’s Word) have in order to grow? How can the soil (one’s heart) be improved in order to provide a fertile place in which the seed can grow? See 2 Chronicles 32:26; Psalm 34:18; Jeremiah 4:14; Ezekiel 36:26; Philippians 4:7; Hebrews 8:10. • How can we help the seed (the Word of God) take root in the soil (one’s heart)? See Luke 11:28; Psalm 119:11, 97; John 5:39, 40; James

Delving Into the Word

Discussing the Ideas

1. What does it mean to be reborn or die daily?
2. Who has the hardest work in changing a person’s life—God or humans? Why?
3. What do humans do to sabotage God’s work in their lives?
4. What things do you think God wants to develop in your life at the moment? Why?
5. How would you know if you were being reborn?

Closing the Activity

Put some chocolates or another type of sweet with one on its own in a basket and the remainder all together in another basket.

Ask: • Which basket would you like to have—the one with many or the basket with just one? • Which basket would be the most expensive in terms of the chocolates, and why?

Then tell them that God wants them to be like the chocolates that are altogether. However, it will cost them something to be that way. They have to surrender to God and let Him reproduce His character in them. If they are willing to allow God to change them and to help them grow—pay the cost—they can take a chocolate and pray silently for this to happen.

Glenn Townend, Lesmurdie, Perth, Western Australia
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Lesson 12

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Christ in the Crucible

Surveying the Source

Plotting the Course
The students will:
► Experience the pain which Christ endured for us.
► Allow themselves to feel their own pain and disappointments.
► Know personally the presence of God through their own pain and failure.

Preparing to Lead
Recently, my son was in a near-fatal automobile accident and sustained multiple injuries including brain trauma. Since our hospital was not equipped to care for his extensive injuries, he was flown to another hospital. The next five weeks of hospitalization were an emotional roller coaster as he danced on the edge of death. Who sustained me through this crisis? A Father who had watched His Son die, a Son who Himself faced death, and a Comforter who had been with those who suffered before. Pain is an inevitable part of life. We do not have to face it alone.

Getting Started
A. Beforehand, take three pieces of metal. With a hammer and punch (nail or screwdriver), hammer out figures 1 and 2 from the reproducible activity (p. 42; the design is the size of a frozen juice can lid, but it can be enlarged). In class, overlay the design on blank metal and begin to punch. After a few punches ask, “How would feel if you were the metal?” Next, show your partial model (figure 2), and let them guess what the final design is. Talking points: ● without punches (pain) there is no picture ● unless the process is complete, the picture is unclear ● scars share a message that the untouched surface cannot.

Delving Into the Word
A. Read Matthew 27 as a group, with the dialogue being read by people representing the different characters in the story. The New Living Translation or the Contemporary English Version is recommended, but other contemporary transla-
He is still with us in our suffering to thank Him that He sometimes chooses to relieve us of our suffering; but even when He does not, He does not leave us without hope to intercede for friends who may be suffering right now.

Have the class divide into groups of two or three for prayer. Tell them that their prayers should reflect the following objectives:

- to express awe that Christ would voluntarily suffer on the cross for us
- to thank Jesus that through His Spirit male/female, upper classmen versus lower classmen, brunettes versus blondes and redheads, etc. The groups will read two scriptural passages on suffering antiphonally [back and forth], each member reading one verse in turn until both passages have been completed. The two passages are 2 Corinthians 4:8–18 and Isaiah 53:3–12.

Then let each of the “characters” express how their group related to the suffering of Christ.

Discuss what His suffering meant to them then and how they might have related to it in the future. Discuss what Christ’s suffering meant to the nonspeaking characters in the chapter, such as, our heavenly Father, Simon of Cyrene, Mary, Mary Magdalene, etc. Next, have the students apply what they learned from the story to how we can relate to Christ in our times of suffering and how God watches over us.

B. Divide the class into two roughly equal groups. Methods of division might include odd versus even birth months, male/female, upper classmen versus lower classmen, brunettes versus blondes and redheads, etc. The groups will read two scriptural passages on suffering antiphonally [back and forth], each member reading one verse in turn until both passages have been completed. The two passages are 2 Corinthians 4:8–18 and Isaiah 53:3–12.

Group 1, first reader, starts with 2 Corinthians 4:8, and is followed by Group 2, first reader, Isaiah 53:3, who is followed by Group 1, second reader, 2 Corinthians 4:9, who is followed by Group 2, second reader, Isaiah 53:4, etc., until both passages have been completed.

Then ask both groups to compare the sufferings of Christ with those of His followers (notably Paul, who represents all of us).

Talking points:

- How does Christ’s suffering enable Him to relate to ours?
- What hope do these passages offer to those who suffer?
- What do both of these passages suggest about people who say that if we have enough faith we can bypass suffering (cancer, unpaid bills, loss of loved ones, etc.)?

Discussing the Ideas

1. What is the role of faith when a Christian faces suffering?
2. How does Jesus’ endurance of suffering enable Him to minister to us as sufferers?
3. What hope does God bring to those who suffer?
4. What is it about Christ’s suffering that draws us closer to Him?
5. Why did God permit His only Son to suffer when He could easily have spared Him?
6. What are God’s possible purposes for allowing us to suffer?
7. How would you relate to a person who suggests that your cancer (or other suffering) is evidence that you lack faith?

Closing the Activity

Have the class divide into groups of two or three for prayer. Tell them that their prayers should reflect the following objectives:

- to express awe that Christ would voluntarily suffer on the cross for us
- to thank Jesus that through His Spirit

He is still with us in our suffering to thank Him that He sometimes chooses to relieve us of our suffering; but even when He does not, He does not leave us without hope to intercede for friends who may be suffering right now.

Dan Solis, College Place, Washington, U.S.A.
Figure 1 is the completed cross. Show it at the end. Figure 2 is the partial cross. Show it to give class members a chance to guess the final design. Figure 3 is the one you should use in the class because it does not reveal the final design. Cut it out for use in the class. A metal punch and hammer work best, but a nail, an awl, or small “Phillips” screwdriver also work well.