

ADULT CONNECTION



DECEMBER 2016

THE GIFT



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

It is hard to believe that Christmas is around the corner. It is a time for the giving and receiving of gifts with friends and family as an expression of our love for one another. As we celebrate in the holiday tradition wishing everyone a “Merry Christmas,” let’s not only wish them one but let’s give them one by sharing the greatest gift ever given to mankind—the gift of Christ. The central theme of the lessons this month is focused on this most precious gift that God gave to humanity, His Son. In Christ, we have been given forgiveness, love, hope, justification, and so much more. So as we study these lessons pray and ask the Lord to open opportunities to give this gift to others.

The layout of this new curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to engage in each week’s study by internalizing and applying it. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own approach for preparing the lesson and we encourage them to teach in the way that makes him or her most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

Now that we have used this curriculum for the past 3 months, we invite your feedback. Go to feedback.fbcfw.org and take the online survey to help us continue to improve our discipleship materials. Have a Merry Christmas!

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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December 4, 2016



The Gift of Contentment

Philippians 4:10-20

Focal Verse:

"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."

Philippians 4:11

Introduce

Formerly Thanksgiving represented a time to reflect on our blessings from God and spend enjoying fellowship with our family and friends. In recent days, however, it has become a time to consume extra carbohydrates for a boost of energy in preparation for the mayhem that will soon occur in

stores as customers fight, literally in some cases, for bargains on the newest and greatest toys, electronics, and clothes. In past years, stores would open early Friday morning, affectionately known by retailers as Black Friday, but now they open even earlier—



including on Thanksgiving evening itself. People wait in line hours and sometimes days before the doors open; when they open, people flood into the stores by pushing and shoving their way through the entrance. Some people are trampled, while others get into fisticuffs trying to secure the last item on sale at a deep discount. Carts clang together and people claw and scratch not just for a good deal, but because they are actually discontent with what they already have and want more of what they desire but don't really need—their attitude for consuming will never be satisfied because some greater luxury will always exist in relation to what they have.

While many may see Black Friday as a means to get a bargain, it also shows the desperation and dissatisfaction of our society. Even though some of

Introduce

the items purchased on this day may be gifts for others, many of us buy them for our own benefit—if we are honest with ourselves—because we are not satisfied with what we already have. As Christmas nears, think about all the things you have in your closets, your attic, your garage, or even in a rented storage locker or building. Many of these items that we have collecting dust and taking up space once were thought of as must-have possessions, but as new, more updated products are purchased the old become obsolete—not because they no longer work, but because we have become discontent with what we have.

Because we live in a consumer and entertainment-oriented society, many have a low level of satisfaction; their satisfaction depends upon possessions and people which constantly change. Conversely, the Apostle Paul can be content in any circumstance—whether he has little or much, whether he has plenty of food or none, whether he is imprisoned or free, or whether he suffers greatly or enjoys relative peace in his ministry—because he has learned the secret to contentment. The only way that we can have true contentment in our lives is to trust wholeheartedly in Christ who never changes and rely on His strength through which He meets our needs according to God's glorious riches.

Key Question

How can we have true contentment in our lives? To have true contentment what must our perspective be?

Philippians 4:10

CONTENTMENT IS DISPLAYED THROUGH CARING:

As he does often in this letter, Paul breaks into spontaneous joy when he recalls his relationship with the Philippians, especially when he remembers their loving support for his welfare and ministry. Not only does the apostle **rejoice in the Lord**, but he does so **greatly (v. 10)**. Part of his joy centers around their renewed **care for** him which has **flourished again** through their sending of Epaphroditus to his aid while under house arrest in Rome ([Phil 2:25-30](#)). As we will see in [Phil 4:14-18](#), the Philippians had a long history of partnering with and supporting the Apostle Paul, but in recent days they **lacked opportunity** to express their **care** in tangible ways, but with his imprisonment their **care** once again became evident to all.

In-Depth Information



The word translated **care** and sometimes **concern** comes from the Greek word **mind** or **thought**—which has been a common theme throughout *Philippians* where Paul has urged them to have the **same mind** or have the **mind** of Christ Jesus. Literally, Paul is commending the *Philippians* for thinking about him—in other words showing concern or care when they can. If we have the **mind** of Christ Jesus ([Phil 2:5](#)), we will naturally exhibit care and concern for others and look for opportunities to serve and help when needed.

Instruct

When we have contentment through the Lord, we will look for opportunities to assist others; true contentment finds joy in having a spirit of giving rather than receiving only. Today, many people lack contentment because they focus on their needs and circumstances rather than seeing the bigger picture in which we find our satisfaction in the Lord by serving Him. In reality, sin is an expression of our discontentment; God had given Adam and Eve every tree from the garden to eat, *except for one*. The couple, however, couldn't see the bigger picture in their relationship with God and serving Him, but they focused on their desires and were dissatisfied with eating of *all the other trees* in the garden that God had given them; this led them ultimately to eat the forbidden fruit. This discontentment with our lives has continued throughout human history. As God's people, however, we need to reverse this trend and seek satisfaction in Him.



Why could discontentment lead to sin?

Question
1

Philippians 4:11-13

BE CONTENT IN EVERYTHING:

Paul doesn't speak out of **need** when he **rejoiced** over their care for him, but he emphasizes that he has **learned to be content** in any

circumstance ([v. 11](#)). Although Paul was grateful for the Philippians' gift, he wants them to know that neither his joy or his contentment depends upon it. Consequently, being content is **learned** through experience; because of the sinful condition of this world, being discontent is innate to our lives—that is we don't have to learn to be dissatisfied or unhappy. Trying to find contentment, however, can be a struggle if we have the wrong perspective.

In what way do we see discontentment in the world and in the church? How should we, as Christians overcome being discontent?

Question
2

In [verse 12](#), Paul further explains in what situations he has learned to be content. He alternates between experiences which we would identify as bad and good; for example, Paul says he **knows how to be abased**—that is to have nothing—and **how to abound**. Yet, Paul himself doesn't label these experiences as bad or good because he doesn't focus on his circumstances, but rather he



London, England during the Blitz 1940-1941: People go about their daily lives not focusing on their struggles.

focuses on Christ. As a result, whether something bad or good happens to him doesn't matter and it doesn't affect his contentment because he can see the bigger picture in Christ.

Paul describes three general areas in which he has **learned to be content**. First, he remains content even though he may **be abased** or

Instruct

whether he may **abound**. The word used for abased comes from the word often translated humbled; therefore, Paul asserts that he can live according to humble means—that is having very little or even nothing. Abound, obviously, represents the opposite in which he lives in abundance with much stability. In this first pair of experiences, Paul addresses physical needs which he also continues into the second pair where he has **learned to be content** whether he is **full** or **hungry**. No matter what may happen to him physically, Paul can remain **content** despite his circumstances. Finally, he can remain **content** whether he **abounds** or **suffers need**. This last category is more broad and includes not only physical needs, but also other social and ministerial needs; therefore, Paul can be content when he is persecuted for the sake of the gospel and when he has tremendous response, when he has been imprisoned for Christ and when he remains free, when he has churches who partner with him effectively and when the church has problems, and whether God removes the thorn in his flesh or allows it to remain ([2 Cor 12:7-9](#)). Paul can remain content in every circumstance because he realizes that God’s “grace is sufficient for [him], for My strength is made perfect in weakness” ([2 Cor 12:9](#)).



In what areas of your life do you have contentment or discontentment? How can you be content in every area of your life?

Question
3

In [verse 13](#), Paul states the secret to his contentment; he proclaims that he **can do all things through Christ who strengthens** him. Often this verse is taken out of context and applied broadly to show how God empowers us to do difficult or even impossible things in our lives. Certainly, God can and does empower us to accomplish miraculous feats for Him, but in this context the verse signifies the **strength** that **Christ** supplies for us to remain **content** in whatever circumstance we encounter along our journey. Therefore, when Paul says he **can do all things** it points back to the previous verse where he states that he **has learned to be content everywhere and in all things**. True contentment can only come as a result of a healthy relationship with Christ. Being content doesn't equate with being lazy and doing nothing to better one's circumstances, but it means that we trust God to meet our needs as He sees fit and work according to His will to serve and honor Him ([Matt 6:34](#)). Discontentment can either arise through complaints about not having enough or it can arise through laments about being unable to change one's situation—whether health, job, finances, or relationships—but true contentment comes by depending upon the Lord. Richard Melick says it well, "One mark of maturity in Christ is that the mature know how to depend on the Lord in every situation of life, not only in those for which they assume they need help." *

In what ways does Christ empower us to be content? How do we see contentment in Jesus' earthly ministry in the Gospels?

Question
4

Philippians 4:14-18

CONTENTMENT PRODUCES COOPERATION:

After reminding them that their strength comes from Christ, Paul thanks the Philippians for their cooperation in his ministry. Over the course of these verses, he mentions three ways that they have joined him in ministry: **1)** in the offering to the Jerusalem church affected by a famine ([v. 15](#)), **2)** aid in Thessalonica ([v. 16](#)), and **3)** sending Epaphroditus to help him while in prison (v. 18). Although Paul appreciates that they shared in his **distress** (see [Phil 1:7](#) also), he did not actively **seek** a **gift** from them, but rather they responded to his need out of genuine love and concern for him by investing in his ministry ([Phil 4:17](#)); therefore, he wants them to know that their investment has paid off by bearing **fruit**. In other words, he desires the Philippians to see the bigger picture of their cooperation—they not only helped a distressed Paul, but they helped him to minister to countless others by extension.



Be one who contributes rather than one who merely takes.

In what way can you help others to bear fruit in advancing the gospel? Does this relieve you of your responsibility to advance the gospel? (Read [Phil 1:3-7](#) to help you answer this.)

Question
5

When we have contentment in Christ and a proper perspective of our role in ministry, we will gladly use the resources that God has graciously given us to help others advance the gospel. Perhaps the most-telling avenue of the Philippians' cooperation was through their offering to the Jerusalem church where Paul writes this about them: "That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" ([2 Cor 8:2](#)). The Philippians could have protested Paul asking them to help the Jerusalem church; they could have looked at what they didn't have in terms of resources and refused to help, but instead they gave generously. So many of us may express discontentment in our lives by focusing on our lack of resources, a lack of time, a lack of training, or even a lack of skill or ability; whatever our perceived lack may be, it should never be a valid reason for not cooperating with others to produce **fruit** in ministry. On the contrary, when our contentment focuses on Christ and His strength and not our own lives, we will be fruitful partners in ministry working together to advance the gospel.

How has discontentment ever hindered your participation in a fruitful ministry? How can we overcome discontentment to become fruitful and invest in a productive ministry (not just financially, but in other ways)?

Question
6

Philippians 4:19-20

CONTENTMENT IS FOUND IN CHRIST ALONE:

Paul ends this section by demonstrating in whom true contentment is found. He exclaims that all their needs will be met by God through His riches in glory by Christ Jesus ([v. 19](#)). When we first glance at this verse apart from the previous context, we may tend to focus on God's meeting of our physical or material needs only; however, this misses the predominate point of the entire passage: our contentment doesn't depend upon having our physical needs met only—for if that were the case then we would never be satisfied. Certainly, God does supply our physical needs, but He alone is the source of our satisfaction. When Paul notes that God will supply their need, he uses a word which is often translated "fulfill" and can sometimes be used to mean "satisfy"; thus, in a way, Paul demonstrates that God satisfies or gives the Philippians contentment in every circumstance just as He has for the apostle—whether they have much or little. Consequently, the riches to which Paul refers come through the sacrificial death of Jesus and do not primarily refer to wealth here on earth; while here on earth we can only have contentment when we look past material possessions and focus on what awaits us in heaven. Jesus' advice in His Sermon on the Mount rings true here: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is,

there your heart will be also” ([Matt 6:19-21](#); see also [Psalm 20:4](#)). True contentment comes not only when we trust God to meet our needs, but that we accept that all of our needs have already been met on Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross.

Why can we only be content when we focus on God’s riches offered through the cross?

Question
7

Inspire

Every Christmas, we celebrate with our family and friends by exchanging gifts; packages are wrapped in exquisite paper or tenderly placed in decorative gift bags with colorful tissue paper protruding from the top and set under the Christmas tree with its shiny garland, brilliant lights, and manifold ornaments collected over the years. Excited children and adults pick up the presents to weigh their contents and gently shake them in hopes of discovering what the gift inside may actually be; anticipation builds as we draw closer to Christmas. On that day when the gifts are distributed, smiles light our faces as we finally open the long-awaited packages; we can hardly wait and in a moment of furious ripping and tearing where shreds of paper and tissue litter the room we finally lay eyes on our gifts and a sense of joy and satisfaction comes over us as we can begin using them. Yet, over the course of the



coming months, the excitement with the gift fades and most of them end up unused in storage or designated for a yard sale because we have lost our contentment and we have moved on to something that we consider more worthy of our time.

True contentment in our lives, however, can only come through our relationship with Christ in which He gives us a proper perspective whereby we focus not on our circumstances, but rather on the glorious riches in heaven that we have awaiting us because of His sacrificial death on the cross. When we look at our circumstances or focus on our material possessions, we fail to see the bigger picture of how truly blessed we are in the Lord and we miss joy and satisfaction in life because we continually seek to keep up with the Jones' by getting more and doing more which ultimately leads to more stress and discontentment. On the contrary, we should seek to be content in every circumstance—just like Paul. He endured hardship, persecution, and lack of resources, but at times he also had an abundance. Yet, in whatever circumstance which he faced he was content because he understood his worth and spiritual wealth in Christ Jesus. With the Christmas holiday soon approaching, what better gift could we receive than having true contentment in the Lord—contentment that lasts and never fades?

*** In Reference**



Reference from page 10

Richard R. Melick, Jr., Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, The New American Commentary, p. 155.

Incorporate

In what areas of your life do you find the most contentment and why do you think that is? Only you will see this, so be honest and ask God to help you evaluate your life realistically.

- Finances
- Retirement/Ability to Retire
- Health
- Entertainment (Movies, TV, Sports, etc.)
- Travel/Vacation
- Hobbies (Cooking, Shopping, Collecting, Gardening, etc.)
- Bible Study/Prayer
- Serving in the Church
- Tithing/Offering
- Fellowship with other Christians
- Other _____

Using the same categories as above, on which do you spend most of your time? What does that say about where your contentment lies? Based on your response, evaluate what your contentment depends upon and how God-centered it is.

Incorporate

Thinking back over your life, describe a time when you were content and one when you were discontent. When you were content, on what did you focus? Why do you think you experienced discontentment in your life at that time? How did you overcome your discontentment? Using what you learned this week, how can you maintain persistent contentment in your life?

Journal: Document God's Work

December 13, 2016



***The Gift of
Life
John 1:1-5***

Focal Verse:

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."

John 1:4

Introduce

As we gather as families in two weeks to celebrate Christmas, the conversation at some point during the holiday will probably turn to memories of past Christmases in which we reminisce about funny family moments at the dinner table or some of the more-notable presents that we have received. Take a moment to think about the most-memorable gift that you ever received—whether from a friend or family member. What made that gift stand apart from all of the others? Why did it make a lasting impression on your life? Typically, the gifts that make the greatest impressions are the ones given by someone with whom we have a close relationship; in addition, they were likely gifts that we had asked for and anticipated.



Even though many times they weren't the most expensive gifts, they still required a great sacrifice on the part of the giver. Most likely, these gifts were not merely generic gift cards which took little thought and effort to buy, but rather they were purchased with you specifically in mind.

Yet, one gift that has been given tops all the other gifts that we have ever received because it was uniquely tailored with every one of us in mind. Indeed, this gift was given by someone who loves us so much that He spared no expense in what He gave ([John 3:16](#)). Although this gift is freely offered to us, it cost the Giver everything—including His very life. This gift is so monumental and so significant that we could never repay it if required nor could we purchase it for ourselves. Most of us are familiar with

Introduce

[Romans 6:23](#) which says, “For the wages of sin is death”—and this is where we stop. However, the second half of the verse is even more important for it states, “But the *gift* of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No human gift could ever match this gracious gift from God!

Although we don’t usually recognize [John 1:1-5](#) as part of the Christmas story, it actually serves to identify why Jesus became flesh in the form of a baby born in a humble stable; He came on our behalf because “in Him was life” ([John 1:4](#))—He is the sole source of life through which we can move from being dead in our sins to having eternal life ([John 5:24](#)). As we look forward to celebrating Christmas, may we remember that without this gift that was born over 2000 years ago we would have no hope and we would have no life. If, as you go through this lesson, you realize that you have never accepted the gift that Jesus offers, please contact your Connect Class teacher, the Ministerial Staff, or another member who can share with you how to have assurance and accept the free gift which was offered for each one of us.

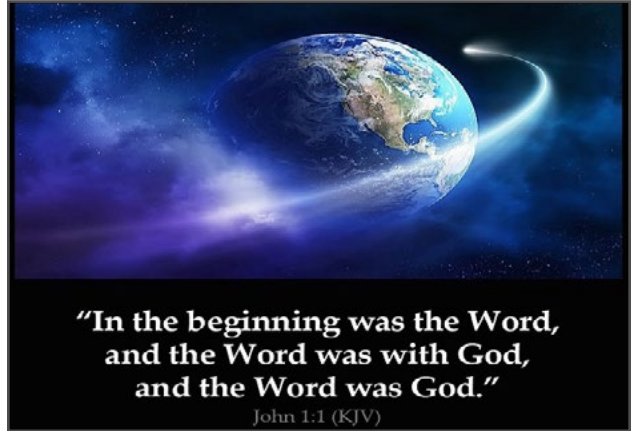
Key
Question

What does it mean to have life in the Word? How can we have that life?

John 1:1-2

THE NATURE OF THE WORD:

Echoing the opening sentence of Gen 1:1, John declares **in the beginning was the Word**. Instead of focusing on the act of creation itself, John describes the nature and function of the One who created it. In the first two verses, He outlines two characteristics



about the Word's nature: first, He is eternal, and second, He is divine. First, John describes the eternal nature of the second person of the Trinity (Jesus). Twice, John notes that the **Word** (Jesus) was **in the beginning** along with **God** the Father. The Word is not a created being; He didn't begin His existence at His physical birth into the world whereby He became flesh, but rather Jesus has always existed even before the creation of the universe and, as we will see in the discussion of His function, the universe was created through Him.

Second, John expands upon the eternal nature of the Word by demonstrating that **the Word was** not only **with God**, but **the Word was** [and is] **God**. Many people believe that Jesus was merely a good man or a good teacher, but this contradicts Scripture and what Jesus Himself taught. Jesus is not "a god" nor did He become "god," but He is the one true and living God—the Creator and Savior of the entire universe. Throughout His ministry, Jesus often caused controversy because people misconceived

His true identity as God and merely thought of Him as a man; however, Jesus clearly identifies Himself as God. To the Pharisees in [John 8:58](#) He declares, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” Here Jesus affirms not only His eternity, but also His identity by using the Old Testament name of God given to Moses at the burning bush in [Exod 3:14](#). Again, in [John 10:30](#), Jesus asserts, “I and the Father are one”; in both [John 8](#) and [10](#), the people led by the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus for blasphemy whereby He claimed to be equal with God. Just before His death on the cross, Jesus explains to His disciples, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” ([John 14:7](#)). These are only a few references to Jesus demonstrating His divine identity which John makes explicit in the opening to His Gospel where He advocates that **the Word was God**.

How can you defend Jesus’ identity as God to other religions, especially Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses?

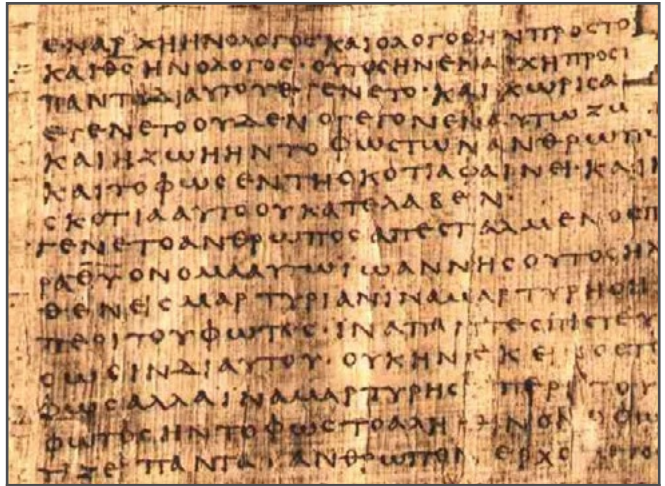
Question
1

John 1:3-5

THE FUNCTION OF THE WORD:

In [verses 3-5](#), we observe two principal functions of the **Word** as **life** and **light** which have monumental significance for every one of us. First, John details how the **Word** is the sole source of **life** in terms of both physical and spiritual life. In accordance with Genesis, John demonstrates how

the Word participated in the very act of creation and the development of physical life. When we recall God’s creation of the universe, we are reminded that He spoke all of it into existence—with the exception of man whom He formed from the dust and breathed life into his nostrils ([Gen 2:7](#)). John’s point with connecting the **Word** with **life** is that everything which is an animate, living object—as well as those things that aren’t—owes its existence to Him. For this reason, John emphasizes that **all things were made through Him**; if something



One of the earliest copies of the Gospel of John: Notice the lack of space between the words and the lack of punctuation.

exists, it was made by and through the **Word** and **without Him** we would have no life and no universe. In [Col 1:16](#), Paul shares this same perspective: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” Thus, Jesus is the source of life itself!

What is the evidence that someone may have physical life, but that they may not have spiritual or eternal life in Christ?

Question # 2

In-Depth Information



In the earliest Greek manuscripts of John, scribes did not use punctuation nor did they separate the words with a space in order to conserve room and reduce cost by using less material on which they wrote; therefore, the reader, and in our case, translator must understand the larger context in order to divide the words and sentences properly so that it doesn't distort John's meaning. For example, most translations of [1:3-4](#) read: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life . . ." However, an alternative way of punctuating this used by the RSV and many of the ancient theologians helps us to understand more clearly what John intended: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made. That [which] was made in Him was life." Throughout John's Gospel, he desires his reader to recognize that Jesus is the source of life; in other words, that which Jesus created not only at the dawn of creation, but also through his sacrificial death on the cross was life itself.

Just as John explains that all physical life owes its existence to Jesus, so also do any of us who have eternal life; **that** which is **created** by **Him is life** and apart from **Him** no one can have eternal life. Although John focuses on the Word's creation of physical **life** in his introduction, the rest of his Gospel strongly emphasizes that Jesus is the sole source of spiritual **life**. In teaching His disciples, Jesus proclaims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one come to the Father except through Me" ([John 14:6](#)).

By no other means can we attain eternal life except by the gift that Jesus Christ offers in His sacrificial death on our behalf. Even though people may be a living, breathing animate object, apart from Christ they truly do not have life because they are dead in their sins and trespasses ([Eph 2:1-3](#)). John develops this theme of spiritual life throughout his Gospel in which Jesus is shown to be the source of everlasting life ([John 3:15-16](#); [5:21](#) & [24](#)), the living water ([John 4:10](#) & [14](#)), the bread of life ([John 6:33](#), [35](#), & [48](#)), the light of the world that gives life ([John 8:12](#)), and the resurrection and the life ([John 11:25](#)). What a great gift that Jesus offers us—**life in Him**.

In what ways can you observe Jesus' life-giving power in your own life?

Question
3

Second, John reveals the Word's purpose in being **light** ([v. 4](#)). Light has three specific characteristics that we can see in this context: **1**) it enables life, **2**) it enlightens the truth, and **3**) it exposes wickedness (or darkness). John starts by showing the close connection between life and light: **life was the light of men**. With John's close connection to Genesis, we can easily see that light enables life; when God began His creative work on the first day, He spoke light into existence—separating light from the darkness ([Gen 1:3-4](#)). Without physical **light**, we would have no **life**; plants



depend upon light for photosynthesis, the entire planet depends upon **light** for warmth, and humans depend upon light for Vitamin D—to name a few essential uses. In the same way, Jesus, as the Light of the world, enables eternal life through His sacrifice. Just as if we did not have the sun for physical life if we don't have a relationship with God's Son we will never have everlasting life. In his first letter, John writes, "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (5:12).

In addition to enabling life, light also enlightens people to the truth by metaphorically expelling darkness which represents ignorance. When pronouncing that the **Word** has come into the world, John simply notes

The truth is still the truth

even if no one believes it

A lie is still a lie

even if everyone believes it

that the **light shines in the darkness** ([v. 5](#)). Light helps us to understand the truth because it enables us to see clearly so that we can judge right from wrong. Before the time change in the first week of November, most of us probably rose while it was

still dark and began to dress for work or school. In the dark or even dimly lit closet, we picked out what we would wear, trying to find the clothes that would match. Unfortunately, if many of you are like me, we think that we have matching clothes, such as a navy blue suit, only to get out in the bright sunlight when it rises to learn that we have navy blue trousers with a black suit coat. In the dark, they looked almost identical

and we wore them with confidence that they matched, but when the light expelled the darkness the truth was revealed—our clothes, shoes, or even socks don't match. Today, truth and error look almost identical, especially when people claim that absolute truth doesn't exist; errors may sound good and they may even be logical, but when held to the light it demonstrates their flaws and people can see the truth. However, we can't differentiate the truth from error if we don't know where to find the source of truth. Jesus, as we have seen in [John 14:6](#), is truth; therefore, to recognize and **comprehend** truth we must have a relationship with the One who is the source of truth; the world doesn't comprehend the Light because it doesn't have a relationship with Him and, like the Ethiopian Eunuch, it doesn't understand the message unless someone takes the time to explain it to them ([Acts 8:31](#)). Moreover, not only is Jesus truth, but God's Word contains truth for Jesus Himself points out, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" ([John 17:17](#)). In order to evaluate the truth and test whether or not something is true, we must have the standard ingrained within us. For example, when bank tellers are being taught to identify counterfeit bills, they only deal with real currency; they visually identify the watermarks on the bill and the counterfeit strip inside; they even grasp it with their fingers so they know how true currency should feel. In all of their training, they are never exposed to a counterfeit bill whatsoever—they only know the truth. Because they know



what true currency looks and feels like, they can spot the fakes—some of them even so good that they would fool uninitiated people. Therefore, in order for us to avoid the lies and falsities of the evil one, we must know the truth and have a relationship with Him; in this way, Jesus expels the darkness in our lives by being the truth and visibly demonstrating the truth for us. John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” ([John 1:14](#)); therefore, we must look to the truth rather than allowing the counterfeit truth of the culture to infiltrate our minds and influence our paths.

Why is it difficult to discern truth from a lie in our modern world? How should we use the “light” to test whether something is true or not?

Question
4

Finally, light also exposes sinfulness. Frequently, when people sin, they try to conceal their sins just as a thief tries to pick the darkest place of the home to enter it; most thieves wouldn’t break a window or smash a door directly under a porch light, instead they might try to find some bushes or go around to the backyard which cannot be seen from the street; they try to obscure their activity. Today, people who sin try to cover their tracks by lying; they don’t want their sins exposed to all. In His speech to Nicodemus, Jesus affirms, “And this is the condemnation,



that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” ([John 3:19](#)).

Yet, we have been called to be people of the light rather than people of **darkness**; we are to live transformed lives that reflect Christ and His righteousness. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus urges His disciples, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” ([Matt 5:14-16](#)). Light exposes sin and degradation and indeed Paul challenges the Ephesians to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” ([Eph 5:11](#)). Often, if we live the way we ought around others, the light in our own lives becomes a testimony and witness for Christ; this does not relieve us from verbally sharing the gospel, but it serves as a precursor because people will be able to observe the transformation in our lives.

What times in your life have you let your light shine before men that they noticed? How did others react? How did it give you a chance to present the gospel?

Question
5

In Prayer



If others don't see a difference in your life, pray and ask God how you ought to live out your salvation in a visible way.

This week we have examined the greatest gift ever offered in this world—life in Christ Jesus. Think back over the past gifts that you may have received in your life. Have you ever received a gift that you really didn't want or one that you didn't really know what it was or even how to use it until you were told? Most of us could answer in the affirmative to at least one and probably both of these questions. In the same way, many people have rejected the free gift

that Jesus offers either because they didn't fully understand it or they didn't actually want it. Several years ago, Bro. Coby Sutherland felt God calling him to witness to his dying neighbor who had been placed on hospice and only had a short time to live. The man never attended



church and he always rejected any kind of religious conversation very sternly. Taking another man from church with him, Bro. Coby approached the topic with trepidation and some fear because he knew his neighbor to be a harsh man. After presenting the gospel, he asked if the man who was uncertain of his very next breath would like to accept Christ as his personal Savior. The man replied, "I'm not ready to invite Jesus into my heart because there are too

many sins that I enjoy and can't give up." The man rejected the gift because he would rather remain in darkness doing what he thought was pleasurable rather than have life in Christ ([John 3:19](#)). This story isn't meant to dissuade anyone from sharing the gospel, but to show the power of darkness in this world which we must overcome with Christ.

We are to continue to go into our culture and present the Truth, but often it is rejected because the world cannot comprehend it. Even during Jesus' day, people rejected the truth even though they had met the Messiah face to face. Today, we live in a culture of moral darkness in which wrong has been labeled right and right has been labeled wrong; our culture values everything, but the truth and tries to change the truth by redefining terms and suggesting that no absolute truth exists apart from the eye of the beholder. In our modern culture, many sins are brazenly done in the open whether in the form of home invasions or alternative sexual lifestyles condemned by God. Even though sin and degradation has gotten worse, the truth has not been obscured and people still come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. We need to be beacons of light who represent Christ. Although we can't enable eternal life ourselves, we need to introduce them to the One who can; we need to reflect the light of the world in our lives—we need to enlighten people by sharing the truth—even if they reject it—and we need expose and expel the darkness of sin in our lives so that we might be effective witnesses for Him.

Incorporate

Using Scripture first and then your personal experience, write a response and defense to someone who claims Jesus isn't God, but just a good man. Actively look for opportunities to share your defense this week as God leads.

Jesus is the Light of the world, but we have also been called to be light. Pray and ask God to help you determine how effective of a light you have been. Record the areas in which you've been effective and the ones upon which you need to improve.

Part of being light is to enlighten people to the truth. This should be done every day, not just when we come to church or just when we have special events to which we invite people. List people here whom you know need to have light in their lives. Not only pray for them, but think of ways that you can continue to share the gospel with them. Some may refuse, like Bro. Coby's neighbor, to listen to the truth, but we are still called to go and share with them.

Incorporate to Impact



We are nearing the end of 2016; pray and ask God to help you share your faith at least once a day in 2017.

Pray that God will send people to whom you can minister—and indeed He will if you are faithful to go. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we as a church could see 365 people saved next year because every member of our church is sharing the gospel on a daily basis!

December 18, 2016



The Promise of a Gift

Matthew 1:18-25

Focal Verse:

“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

Matthew 1:23

Introduce

Undoubtedly, many of us have a multitude of packages under our Christmas trees—unless we are procrastinators who shop at the last minute. The presents likely come in all shapes and sizes and are wrapped in colorful, season-themed paper. Take time to consider this scenario—one particular present catches our eye under the tree because it dwarfs all of the others; wrapped in shiny red paper that glistens when the flicker of the Christmas lights hit it, it has a big green bow in the center. The tag with your name on it hangs slightly askew over the side. Every time we pass by the tree, we can't help but notice the package and ponder what's inside; thinking the package is too heavy to lift, we wait patiently for the designated day to open it. Finally, as our anticipation reaches a fever pitch, the giver of the package slides it in front of us; we begin unwrapping the gift with a smile on our lips, but as the paper is torn and the box opened our smile turns to a perplexed look—nothing is in the box. In our mind, we think this can't be right; who would do something as cruel as this? So we begin to rummage through the box to see if we had indeed missed anything and that's when we find a small paper at the bottom with three letters scrawled on it. We see the letters and can't believe it so we rub our eyes to clear them and read again, but the three letters remain the same: "IOU."

What we thought was an actual gift was in reality only an empty promise in the box. Most IOU's are never fulfilled by people and the expectation of the "promised" gift will never be realized.



Introduce

Fortunately, the God who created us does not make empty promises, but He is always faithful to fulfill His Word. Even though God doesn't owe us anything and should actually punish us because of our rebellion against Him, He still made a promise to His people to send a Messiah to redeem the world. Even after the rebellion of Adam and Eve, the Lord promised that one day Adam's "seed" would "bruise" the serpent's head, conquering sin and death forever ([Gen 3:15](#)). God's promise to rescue not only this couple, but the entire world from their sin was faithfully repeated to subsequent generations and finally fulfilled about 2,010 years ago when a virgin gave birth to a miraculous child who would grow up to be salvation for the whole world. Praise be to God that He faithfully fulfilled His promise to us even though we were unfaithful to Him and through that promised child we might have eternal life.

Key Question

In what ways do we see God's promises of a Messiah fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus Christ?

Matthew 1:18-20

THE DIVINE NATURE OF THE GIFT:

Matthew begins the narrative of Jesus' **birth** by telling the story from Joseph's perspective; since God had not yet revealed to him the miraculous source of Mary's conception by the **Holy Spirit**, it highlights both Joseph's confusion about the pregnancy and his righteous character in dealing with the unexpected and troubling news. Following the marriage customs of the time, he approached Mary's family, particularly her father and other elders, to make arrangements to marry their daughter. Part of the arrangements included the payment of a dowry—that is the payment of goods or money to the bride's family for the loss of their daughter and the transfer of a daughter to the groom's family. With the agreement finalized and the payment of the dowry, the couple became legally married or **betrothed**—similar to but not exactly the same as being engaged today; hence, this is why Matthew can identify Joseph as **her husband** in [verse](#)

[19](#). After the engagement, which often lasted approximately one year, the groom left his bride with her father and returned to his home to prepare a place in his father's house to receive his bride and live with her. During this time of engagement or betrothal, however, the couple did not live together nor did they have a physical relationship until the determined day that the groom would return to take his bride home.



Instruct

The text both here in Matthew and in Luke make it clear that Mary had never had a physical relationship with any man to account for her pregnancy. In [Luke 1:34](#) after the angel told her about her pregnancy, a puzzled Mary inquires, “How can this be,



since I do not know a man?” Matthew also emphasizes that not only had she never had sexual relations with any man, but that she and Joseph also **did not know** one another—that is have physical relations—**until** she had given birth **to her firstborn son** ([Matt 1:25](#)). This lack of physical relations serves to highlight the divine nature of Jesus’ conception for the Holy Spirit worked through Mary’s body to cause her to become pregnant even though she was and remained a virgin until Jesus’ birth (see [Luke 1:35](#)).

At this point in Joseph’s life, God hadn’t made him aware of the divine nature of his wife’s pregnancy. Matthew describes Joseph as a **just man** who wanted to treat Mary respectfully and honorably by **putting her away secretly** rather than **making her a public example** ([Matt 1:19](#)). Obviously, based upon normal human conception, Joseph perceived that Mary had been unfaithful to him during their engagement; he, however, never became irrational and upset, but sought to deal with the situation graciously and mercifully with integrity. He never thought of ways to retaliate against Mary or her family, but instead he showed great

love and forgiveness by desiring not to bring shame upon his wife or her family.

How do you react when you receive troubling or upsetting news? Why is it important to imitate Joseph's integrity and reasoned demeanor when responding?

Question
1

In-Depth Information



In [verse 19](#), Matthew records that Joseph wanted to **put her away secretly**. The term **put away** comes from the Greek word **to release**; in other words, Joseph wanted to release Mary from her contractual obligation to marry him. Because they were officially married after the dowry but in the period of engagement or betrothal, Joseph would have to divorce her through an official process. In fact, most of the modern translations interpret that word as **divorce** ([NIV](#), [ESV](#), [HCSB](#), and [RSV](#)).

As Joseph still pondered his course of action, **an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream** to clarify the situation. The angel reveals that **Mary** had indeed remained faithful to him and that the **Holy Spirit** was the source through which she has **conceived** miraculously; therefore, Joseph should **not be afraid to take** her as his **wife** ([v. 20](#)). Even before learning about Mary's pregnancy,



Instruct

Joseph didn't jump to conclusions or fly off the handle so to speak, but he weighed his actions in his mind so that he could make the best decision for all involved. Too often, in modern society where information comes quickly, we think that we have enough to respond immediately even though we didn't take time to gather all of the facts. These impetuous decisions can cause a myriad of problems, including prescribing guilt to someone who's actually innocent or causing unnecessary unrest and turmoil for the parties involved. Like Joseph, we need to step back from the situation, assess the information, weigh the options, and seek the will of God in our response.

Why is it important to gather information and to spend time weighing our response before making a major decision in our lives? What happened when you or someone you know made a conclusion before receiving all of the facts?

Question
2

Matthew 1:21

THE DELIVERANCE OFFERED THROUGH THE GIFT:

In **verse 21**, the angel continues to give instruction to Joseph about naming the **Son** after Mary gives birth. Explicit in his directives, the angel tells Joseph to **call His name Jesus**. The name Jesus is significant because it foreshadows the ultimate purpose for which this child would be born into the world. "Jesus" is a Greek derivation of the Hebrew name Joshua which means salvation or deliverance—and even more

specifically it means “Yahweh saves.” Consequently, the angel makes reference to this meaning when he announces that Jesus **will save His people from their sins.**



Indeed, approximately thirty-three years later, Jesus will not only deliver **His** own **people** from the bondage of **sin**, but He will also deliver the entire world through His sacrificial death on the cross—what a magnificent gift! God didn’t send an inferior, second-hand gift to save the world that would not have permanent results, but rather He Himself took on flesh and came, so that through Him we might have life in a once-and-for-all sacrifice.

How would you explain the concept of salvation mentioned in this verse to an unchurched person today?

Question
3

Matthew 1:22-23

THE DECLARATION ABOUT THE GIFT:

From the foundation of the world, God had promised to send a Messiah who would deal effectively and permanently with the consequences of sin so that the world may once again have a relationship with Him and be restored to life. Unlike an empty package with an unfulfilled IOU, God has **fulfilled** His promise to us in such a grand, but unexpected way in the sending of His Son; therefore, Matthew notes that **all this was done**

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet (v. 22). Although the promise of the Messiah appears throughout the Law and Prophets in the Old Testament, here Matthew refers to a



specific declaration given by Isaiah who was God’s spokesman in the eighth century BC during the reign of King Ahaz (735-715 BC)—just a little over 700 years before the actual birth of the Messiah.

In its original context, [Isaiah 7:14](#) appears in the midst of a prophetic warning to King Ahaz about the destruction of the Southern Kingdom of Judah by the foreign country of Syria along with an evil alliance between Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) ([Isa 7:1-9](#)). Isaiah, speaking on the Lord’s behalf, prompts King Ahaz to ask for a sign from God ([Isa 7:11](#)); the king, however, steadfastly refuses declaring adamantly that he “will not ask” nor will he “test the Lord” ([Isa 7:12](#)). Isaiah responds by stating, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign” ([Isa 7:14](#)). This sign that would make God’s presence known to Ahaz and assure him about the destruction of Judah was that a woman would give birth to a child and before that child knows how to differentiate right from wrong the Northern Kingdom would fall ([Isa 7:14-15](#)). Consequently, the sign must have significance for Ahaz and relate to the fall of Israel lest Isaiah be labeled as a false prophet and put to death because the Word of the

Lord did not come true. So if the sign was fulfilled in Isaiah's day in reference to the fall of the Northern Kingdom, how can it relate to Jesus in [Matthew 1:18-25](#)?

As the embodiment of God's working through people and nations in the Old Testament, Jesus more fully and more concretely fulfills the sign given to Ahaz in a unique and unparalleled way. Although the sign had immediate consequences for Ahaz, the fullest expression of the prophecy would not be realized for nearly 700 years until the birth of Christ. This time, however, it wasn't a sign of destruction because of a wicked people, but rather it was a sign that God had come in the flesh to conquer sin's dominion over people and rid the world of the death and destruction it causes. Therefore, the emphasis of the sign is the name **Immanuel** which Matthew goes to great lengths to interpret as **God with us** ([Matt 1:23](#)). The sign of salvation, therefore, is the fact that God donned flesh, came into His creation as a baby through the womb of a virgin, and was sentenced to death in our place on the cross. Thus, we can only have salvation because God has revealed Himself directly to us through His Son so as to show us what salvation truly looks like. As a result, Matthew declares that God has literally made Himself manifest among us through the birth of His Son; although God has always been present in His creation and among His people, He now has a unique way to identify with us by taking on human form.

How has God revealed Himself to you specifically in your life? In what way do you see God's presence in your daily life?

Question
4

In-Depth Information



Over the years, much debate has centered around the word *virgin* used by both Isaiah and Matthew. Whether in Hebrew or Greek, many dictionaries define the terms as “a young woman” and further qualify it as one “of marriageable age”—the problem lies, however, with the fact that these words can mean a young woman who has either abstained or participated in sexual activity. Both translation and meaning depend directly upon context. Without sufficient context, words can only have a range of meaning, but context allows us to interpret words more precisely. For example, if I say, “You just broke the record,” do you have enough context to interpret the word “record” precisely? No, because it only has a range of meanings—either a collection of statistics or a flat, vinyl disc with grooves containing audio. Therefore, paying attention to the larger context, not just individual words, is of the utmost importance. The Greek word translated **virgin** in [Matt 1:23](#) may mean “young woman of marriageable age” in some contexts, but in Matthew’s context it must mean **virgin** because he limits the meaning by stressing that Mary has never had physical relations with a man at all ([Matt 1:25](#)).

THE DELIVERY OF THE GIFT:

After waking from the dream in which the angel communicated to him, Joseph obeyed God and **took** Mary as **his wife** instead of divorcing her quietly. Certainly, this dream and the circumstances around the pregnancy were much to process, but Joseph acting with integrity did as **the Lord** had **commanded**. From Luke, we know that because of a required census Joseph took Mary to Bethlehem where she delivered her **firstborn son** ([Luke 2:1-6](#))—God in the form of a baby had now humbly lowered Himself to become part of His creation so that He might redeem it from the grips of sin! For just as the Lord bid through His heavenly messenger, Joseph named **the child Jesus**—at long last the gift of salvation had come and the promise of a Savior had been fulfilled!

What characteristics did Joseph exercise that allowed God to use him and his wife for this monumental task? Why is it important to act with integrity in terms of God's ability to use us to accomplish His will?

Question
5

Perhaps most of us can't identify with someone who's received an IOU as a gift, but most of us can identify with broken promises or even being disappointed in one of our gifts. Probably in past Christmases we hurried to open a gift only to discover it wasn't exactly what we wanted once we removed it from the wrapping paper. Although we were grateful to the giver, we were disappointed in the results. In some ways



God's gift to us through His Son was unexpected and even unconventional, but He surely didn't disappoint us. The unique gift born in that humble stable, laid in a feeding trough, and wrapped in tattered rags didn't look like a gift that amounted to much, but it is only in Him and through His selfless obedience that we can have eternal life. God has fulfilled every one of His promises to us—not according to our own expectations and assumptions, but according to the plan He laid out at the foundation of the world.

As we get closer to the celebration of our Savior's birth, let us be grateful and humble that God cares so much for us that He gave the ultimate gift to us; He didn't merely send a substitute, but He delivered that gift of salvation and life Himself. Gifts here on earth may bring momentary joy and pleasure, but they don't last a lifetime. When we celebrate with

family and friends, let us boldly declare the best gift that we have ever received—it's not something tangible that money can buy, but it does last for eternity. Many of us who are reading this curriculum have already accepted that free gift of salvation from God, but if you haven't accepted it don't wait because we are never assured of tomorrow. As you gather with your family or among friends, make sure you tell someone about this unusual, but desperately needed gift from God who is here with us to offer us salvation and life. Let us not keep silent, but share the good news of this great gift.

In Prayer



Spend time giving thanks to God for this incomprehensible gift that He has given us. Ask God to help you show your gratitude by sharing that gift with others through bold proclamation of the gospel.

Incorporate

This week we have looked at the Christmas story from the perspective of a promised gift that God revealed through the pages of the Old Testament. The promise is meant to be shared with others. When we share the good news about this gift with others, what are the elements from [Matthew 1:18-25](#) that we ought to emphasize?

Often, as Christians, we get upset with the political correctness where Merry Christmas is replaced with Happy Holidays. Why is complaining about this a misdirection of time, energy, and resources? In what way can you use this debate to share verbally about the gift that was born 2,010 years ago?

Finally, we looked at the Christmas story from Joseph's perspective. Why is it important to maintain an attitude like Joseph had? What characteristics made him an available servant to be used by God? How did Joseph deal effectively with the adversity in His life and how can you apply it to your own life?

Journal: Document God's Work

Journal: Document God's Work

December 25, 2016

A silhouette of a nativity scene is centered against a dark blue, starry night sky. The scene shows a stable with a thatched roof, where a woman is kneeling, a man stands holding a staff, and a baby lies in a manger. The background features rolling hills under a sky filled with stars and a bright star shining from above.

Christmas
A SAVIOR IS BORN

***The Gift of
a Savior
Luke 2:1-21***

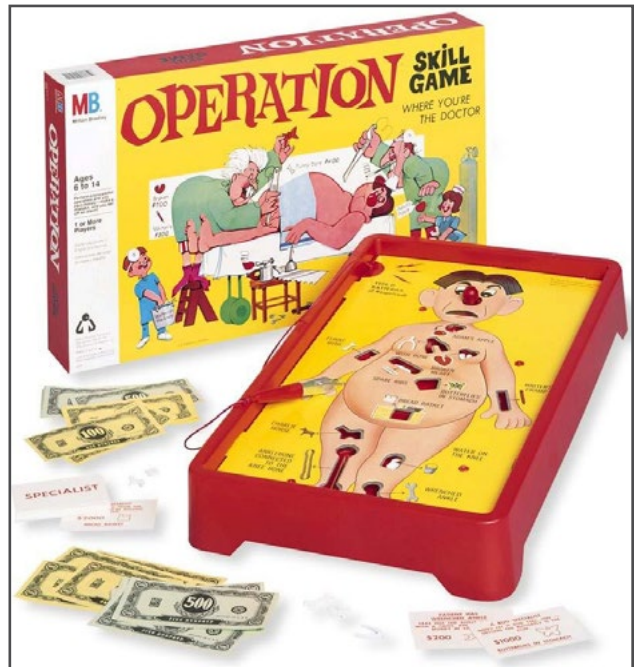
Focal Verse:

"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Luke 2:11

Introduce

As a child before the advent of video games, some of us probably received board games as a Christmas gift. Perhaps outside of the wildly popular games like Monopoly, Life, and Clue among others, whether as children, parents, or grandparents we have likely played the game of Operation. In the game, a man is lying on an operating table with incisions in different areas from which either bones or other objects need to be removed in order to save his life. After drawing a card to see which object ought to be removed first, the player takes a pair of tweezers and gently tries to insert them into the incision without touching the sides; for when the tweezers grazed the metal sides of the incisions, a buzzing sound rattled the operating table and the man's nose flashed bright red. If the player was successful in retrieving the object without touching the sides, he or she received a monetary reward for their services. The goal of the game, therefore, was to remove all of the objects without setting off the alarms and in turn having the most money for successful operations which would save the man's life. The game of Operation required both skill and patience to play and ultimately emerge victorious. Through our own effort and skill, we could learn to remove the objects successfully and save the patient. In the upper right-hand



Introduce

corner, the box identified it as a “skill game where you’re the doctor.” Aside from some children or adults who intentionally liked to set off the buzzer and red light, most worked diligently to save the patient because we wanted to see if we could conquer this challenge.

Unfortunately, many people live their lives as if they were playing the game of Operation—we’re the doctor and only we can save ourselves from the difficulties that we have in life if we are skilled or educated enough. Despite having all of the skill, training, and patience in the world, we cannot save ourselves from the grips of sin and death; therefore, we desperately need a Savior who can. Fortunately, we have a Savior whose birth we celebrate this week who is the only One who can successfully complete the operation in our lives to remove our sin and unrighteousness. On that night of His birth, the heavenly host of angels appeared to the shepherds in the fields as they watched their flocks and announced the birth of such a Savior—One who would ultimately destroy sin and the hold it has on us and give us a second chance at life through Him. Praise be to God that we have a Savior who loved us so much that He obediently came to earth to provide life through His sacrificial death on the cross!

Key Question

In what way have you encountered other people who have treated their lives like this game of Operation?

Luke 2:1-5

THE ANTICIPATION FOR THE SAVIOR:

As a historian writing an orderly account of Jesus' birth, Luke begins by relating the historical setting in anticipation of the actual event. He mentions two historical figures by name: **Augustus**, that is Octavian, who became the first Roman Emperor after Julius Caesar's brutal assassination, and **Quirinius** (ker-in-knee-us) who served on the Roman counsel and later as the governor of Syria. By calculating the reigns of these two individuals along with King Herod who died in 4 BC, we can arrive at the approximate date of Jesus' birth sometime between 6 and 4 BC—the two-year span is necessitated because Herod became paranoid at the wise men's announcement of the birth of a king so he had all the males two years and under put to death in order to protect his throne ([Matt 2:16](#)).

Prior to Jesus' birth before he became the official governor of Syria, Quirinius along with a **decree** issued by the Roman Senate required a **census**; as was custom, people had to return to the region and city in which they had been born and their family resided. Although Joseph had settled in **Nazareth**, as a descendant of David he had to return to the city of **Bethlehem** along with his espoused wife, Mary, who was well advanced in her pregnancy.



"The Census of Quirinius" a Byzantine mosaic from about AD 1315.

Instruct

Many of us may gloss over these historical details, but they serve an important purpose not only of establishing concrete historical data, but also demonstrating the fulfillment of God's plan for the Messiah. In [Micah 5:2](#), the prophet proclaims the details about the birth of this Messiah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Micah lived in the eighth century BC roughly at the same time as the prophet Isaiah whom we studied last week; what Micah prophesied 700 years earlier was now about to come to fruition—the long awaited Messiah was about to make His appearance in the world.

Why is it important to be able to defend the historicity of Jesus' birth?

Question
1

Luke 2:6-7

THE ARRIVAL OF THE SAVIOR:

As not only the divine Savior but also the Creator of the universe, one would expect a grand celebration befitting the birth of a king into a royal family; however, Jesus' birth stands in stark contrast to the imagery of the birth of a future king. Instead of a royal arrival, the Savior was born into humble circumstances into a hard-working family of a carpenter. As the couple had journeyed to Bethlehem for the census, it came time for Mary to give birth and indeed she **brought forth her firstborn son** after they

had found shelter in a stable for the night. After giving birth, she **wrapped** her Son in **swaddling clothes** and laid Him in a **manger**—the feeding trough from which the animals ate. Jesus wasn't born in an opulent palace or the most luxurious home, but He was born in the most deluxe accommodations that His parents could find given the circumstances of overcrowding due to the census. We often think of Him being born into abject poverty, but this isn't Luke's point in recording the place of His birth as a stable and His crib as a **manger**. Rather Jesus' humble birth helps Him to identify with His creation; Jesus connects not with the social elite of His day, but with the common man like **shepherds**; therefore, his birth shows how God desired a relationship with all men, not just the socially privileged and well-educated.



In what way has God called us to be His ambassador to common, everyday people?

Question # 2

In-Depth Information



For centuries, babies, whether in wealthy or poor families, had been wrapped in swaddling clothes which are strips of rags which would ensure the baby's legs and arms would remain straight and prevent any potential health problems (see [Ezek 16:4](#)). The swaddling clothes, therefore, don't merely represent the family's poverty as the only rags they

In-Depth Information—continued



could afford, but they indicated a tradition which everyone followed showing that Jesus was born naturally and was nurtured just as any other baby at that time; consequently, it demonstrates His humble connection to His creation by being born just as we are—He identifies with us in every way ([Heb 4:15](#)).

At the end of [verse 7](#), Luke cites the reason why Mary had to deliver in the stable: **there was no room for them at the inn**. When we typically watch plays about the Christmas story, they have a heartless and inconsiderate innkeeper who turns away the couple with Mary visibly pregnant. Yet, none of the Gospels has the couple interacting with a disgruntled innkeeper. In fact, the word that Luke uses here describes what we would call a “guest room” in a private home rather than an **inn** according to our modern concept of a motel or hotel with multiple rooms. Remember that Joseph has returned to his hometown where he likely had extended family with whom he should have been able to stay in their guest room, but even these individual rooms in private homes were occupied because of the census. Even Joseph’s own family and close friends in the community had nowhere for the couple to lodge. In some ways, this foreshadows how Jesus would come to His own people, but they would reject Him because He didn’t look like the Messiah they expected—they had no room for Him in their beliefs. In [John 1:10-11](#), the apostle writes, “He was in the world, and the world was made through

Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own and His did not receive Him.” Even later during His ministry, Jesus spoke about how “no prophet is accepted in his own country” ([Luke 4:24](#)). Through Jesus’ humble birth and His rejection by the ruling class, Luke emphasizes that, although Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, He did not fit the people’s preconceived expectations of what the Messiah should be or should do.

In what way do we sometimes act that treats Jesus like a burdensome or unwanted guest? How should we make room for Him in our lives?

Question
3

Luke 2:8-15

THE ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE SAVIOR:

Although Jesus’ birth may have been humble lacking the fanfare of a king, the announcement of his birth certainly proved that He was indeed the King. **An angel of the Lord** appeared before a group of **shepherds out in the fields** where they **watched** diligently over their **flock** to protect them from predators **at night**. The sudden appearance of this heavenly being naturally startled the shepherds so much that they became **greatly afraid**. After



bidding the **shepherds** not to fear, the **angel** explains the purpose of his visit for he **brings** them **good tidings of great joy which will be to all people**. The angel continues to explain that the **baby** that has just been **born** is the **Savior**—the Messiah who has come to liberate the world from its enslavement to sin. With the declaration complete, **suddenly a multitude** of angelic beings appeared and began **praising God**. The whole of God’s creation which awaited renewal breaks into spontaneous praise at the arrival of its Savior who promises life and redemption for us all. As a result of this unusual announcement, the **shepherds** determined to travel to **Bethlehem** to witness the event which **the Lord had made known to** them.

This birth announcement has two significances: first, it describes the source of salvation and second, it describes the recipients of salvation. Unlike the game of Operation where we can be the doctor, when it comes to our redemption from sin we have only one source for salvation—**Christ the Lord** ([v. 11](#)). On that night so long ago, salvation entered the world through a tiny baby who would grow up to pay the penalty for our sins on the cross. In addition to the source of salvation, the angel clearly announces the recipients as **all people** ([v. 10](#)). Again, the appearance of an angel to lowly **shepherds** to announce the birth of the King and Creator defies logic because one would expect the immediate family along with other aristocrats and rulers to be the first to know. However, the shepherds here represent common man; they are ordinary people of no reputation, but Christ came as a **baby** to save them just as much as He did the rich and powerful. Jesus is not just the

Savior of Israel, but He is the **Savior** for **all people**—Jesus died for and will save people from all races, from all nations, from all backgrounds, and from all socio-economic statuses—as long as they put their faith and trust in Him and surrender their lives completely to Him.

Who do you know in your sphere of influence that needs to have a relationship with the Savior? Why is it important that we take the gospel to all people on a daily basis?

Question
4

Luke 2:16-21

THE ADORATION OF THE SAVIOR:

The **shepherds** went quickly to **Bethlehem** and found Jesus **lying in a manger** just as the angel

had revealed to them for which they immediately began to rejoice and tell others. Twice in [verses 16-20](#), Luke describes the eagerness of the shepherds to tell others about what God had made known to them. In [v. 17](#), Luke notes the extent to which



they told these events: **widely**. After witnessing such a significant, world-changing event, the shepherds didn't remain silent, but rather they told everyone they met about what they had observed. Further, in [v. 20](#) Luke emphasizes that the **shepherds** continued to **glorify and praise God**

Instruct

for what they had heard and seen. When we look at the response of the shepherds we must remember that it also applies to our lives if we have a relationship with Jesus. First, if we have been truly transformed by Jesus we have a personal testimony which we can tell others about what God has personally done for us. In fact, no one can argue with such a personal testimony with evidence cited from our changed lives. Second, our natural response to the work of God in our lives ought to be to praise Him and worship Him before others by sharing the gospel.

In what ways do you glorify and praise God in your life? How often do you share the good news of a Savior with others? If you don't share the gospel much, prayerfully consider with whom you may partner to be disciplined and held accountable.

Question
5

Inspire

This week we have focused on the gift of salvation which came to earth over 2000 years ago through a heavenly birth. In this world, we have many heroes, such as our first responders, who may risk their lives to save ours. Some of us may have testimonies about a first responder who came to



our rescue during a car accident, fire, fall, or medical emergency and may have even saved our lives. As much as we may owe these heroes, they cannot give life to those who have died—especially eternal life. Therefore, at Christmas we celebrate the only Savior who brought eternal life as a free gift of grace through His own sacrifice.

Because we think of first responders as heroes, we can learn three concrete principles from them. First, they have the right equipment to deal effectively with an emergency. As Christians, God has given us the right equipment to impart eternal life to people through His Word which explains His plan through His Son's death and resurrection. Second, first responders have the right training to assist with the emergency.

we must have the right training through the Bible to explain to people how they may have eternal life through Christ Jesus.

Third, first responders actually put their training to use when they are called upon; their training is not something in theory only which shouldn't be practiced but rather it is practical and to be used.

If they have the best equipment and training and never use it, then what good would it do? If we as Christians have the right message and have been trained to share the gospel, what good would it do if we never witnessed or never shared the gospel? We must apply our training.

Finally, if we have ever been the recipient of someone saving our life, what most likely was your response? With heart-felt gratitude you probably not only thanked the person who saved your life, but you



also probably told others the story—recounting every detail. We have a Savior who has given us eternal life; He was born in humble circumstances just as we were; He identifies with common people just like us; and He came with a message of hope in which He did not discriminate but He saves all people who accept His free gift. If we are so eager to tell others about a human first responder who saved our life, then why would we be ashamed to tell of the ultimate Savior who did not merely save us, but gave us eternal life through His death and resurrection. As we go into the New Year, let us commit to tell others daily about this Savior and let us not be silent any longer—seek to know your equipment by reading it daily, seek to be trained to use it through your Connect Classes, Connect Groups, and mentorships, and finally use what you have been given by God to testify to others about the salvation He offers in His Son.

In Prayer



Prayerfully consider how faithful you have been to share this good news of a Savior with others. Ask God to send people to you daily to whom you can share the gospel and disciple and begin praying for a great harvest of souls who begin their relationship with Jesus in 2017.

Incorporate

In [Luke 2:11](#), the angel in his announcement emphasizes “this day”: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” In fact, throughout his Gospel and Acts Luke emphasizes the importance of being saved “today.” Why is it important to view “today” as the day of salvation? If we view as salvation as “today,” what implications does it have on sharing the gospel?

In [Luke 2:8-15](#), we learned about the announcement of the angel to the shepherds and their response. Not only did they go immediately to Bethlehem to search for the baby of which they had been told, but they also began immediately telling people what they had seen and heard. This week make a plan of how you would respond when someone says Happy Holidays or Merry Christmas so that you can share the gospel. On the following lines, write a question or response that could get

Incorporate

someone into a conversation about the gospel. For example, you could say: **Do you know the best gift that most people would want if they heard about it?** Ask God to help you think of ways, like this question, that you could take an ordinary conversation like this and turn it into a conversation about the gospel.

Incorporate to Impact



Be intentional in sharing your faith this Christmas season. If someone says Happy Holidays, take a tract to give them—especially if they are in a store and a long conversation is inconvenient. But most importantly speak boldly about the things that God has shown and taught you personally and use them as a means to share the gospel with a lost and dying world.

December 2016

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