

When Life

Is a **ZOO**

God Still

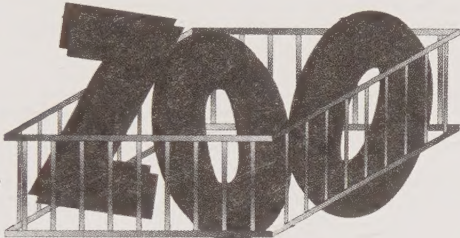
Loves You

WES HAYSTEAD

Leader's Guide



Leader's Guide
for Bob Russell's

When Life
Is a 
God Still
Loves You

Wes Haystead



Based on the book *When Life Is a Zoo, God Still Loves You*, by Bob Russell. It is recommended that each student have a copy of Russell's book to enhance the study.

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Preface

This *Leader's Guide* is designed to assist a teacher or Bible study leader in guiding a group through a study of Bob Russell's book, *When Life Is a Zoo, God Still Loves You*. For maximum benefit, it is recommended that each member of the group have a copy of Mr. Russell's book and read each chapter before the group meets to study and apply the message of that chapter.

The leader of the group should have a copy of Russell's book as well as this book, which contains additional comments on the Scripture texts covered in the textbook and lesson plans to lead "discovery learning" sessions for each chapter.

This course may be used in a variety of settings. Some Sunday school classes will want to use it for a quarter of study. Vacation Bible

Schools may use five or ten of the lessons for youth or adult courses. (Standard Publishing's 1993 VBS course is closely coordinated with this study.) Midweek study groups will also find the lessons stimulating and a refreshing change, perhaps, from straight verse-by-verse type of studies.

The animal kingdom is a delightful illustration of the creativity and loving care of God. Not even a sparrow falls, Jesus said, without the Father's taking note. His care for human beings is even more intense, for God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and find life in his Son. Of all the creatures God has made, the crown of creation is humanity, men and women, whom God loves and for whom he wants only the best.

A Biblical View of Animals

Genesis 1:20-31; Psalm 104

Comments on the Text

There are almost as many animals in the Bible as there are people. There are over 350 references to animals in general (animals, beasts, creatures, and the like) plus many hundreds of other references to domestic livestock (sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, camels). Wild animals (lions, bears, deer, wolves, and others) come in for their share of mention.

On the whole, the Bible views animals positively, and a study of some of the passages where they play major roles is more than intriguing. Such a study will teach us some unique and valuable spiritual lessons.

Animals Belong to God

Creation. We first meet animals in the Bible when we read the initial account of creation: "And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let the birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.' . . . And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. . . . And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:20-25).

These verses overflow with a sense of God's joy and pleasure in his living creatures. His declarations of creation ("Let the waters teem. . . . Let birds fly. . . . Let the land produce living creatures. . . .") seem to convey a sense of excitement about the array of remarkable creatures God envisioned. His evaluations after the fact ("And God saw that it was good") show deep satisfaction with his handiwork.

The Flood. The depth of God's hurt at the sinfulness of humanity is shown in his resolve to "wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them" (Genesis 6:7). On the positive side, we see the animals included in God's plan to salvage the best of his creation: "You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you" (Genesis 6:19).

When the flood was over, God's concern for his animals remained constant. His instructions to Noah included this statement: "Bring out

every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it” (Genesis 8:17).

Animals Are Inferior to People

In addition to the accounts of creation and the flood, many other places in Scripture evidence God’s concern for the well-being of animals: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4). Yet, while the status of animals is obviously important to God, and they are closely linked with the fate of humanity, it is clear that Scripture recognizes people as being different from, and superior to, the animal kingdom. We see the superior value of a person in the punishments meted out in the Mosaic law: “Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death” (Leviticus 24:21).

The apostle Paul, in his great explanation of the resurrection, makes it very clear that people and animals are uniquely different and do not share the same fate: “All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another” (1 Corinthians 15:39).

Animals Are For Human Benefit

Right from the beginning we see that animals, even though created

first, were intended to benefit humanity: “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything” (Genesis 9:3). There is no license given here for wanton abuse of animals, but people are clearly, in both the Old and New Testaments, to enjoy the use of animals for food, for clothing, for work, and for transportation.

Animals Can Teach Us Valuable Spiritual Lessons

What do we learn of the Creator from living with and studying the animals he created? The last twenty-five verses of Psalm 104 give a vivid, poetic description of God’s **greatness** as seen in his provision for wild donkeys, birds of the air, cattle, wild goats, coney (short eared Asian and African relative of the rabbit), lions—creatures without number. The Psalmist seems overwhelmed with the great **wisdom** of God by exclaiming, “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all” (vs. 24). God is clearly portrayed here as the **sustainer** of life, not as an absentee creator who set the world in motion and then left it to its own devices. All God’s diverse creation proclaims his **glory** (vs. 31) and calls forth rejoicing, singing, and praising. The psalm concludes with a warning to the sinners, those who oppose God’s perfect ways.

The lessons we can learn from God’s animals form the focus of the remaining sessions of this course.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

The animals God created provide insights into God's character.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Identify biblical statements about animals that reflect insights into God's character.
2. Describe the relationship between people and animals.
3. Suggest guidelines for dealing responsibly with God's creation.

Before the Lesson

Provide a half sheet of typing paper per person, along with several broad-tipped marking pens and straight pins, safety pins, or masking tape. Make a giant name tag for yourself with your name in large, bold letters on one sheet of paper. Beneath the name, write, "I love . . ." and write or sketch your favorite animal. Pin or tape the name tag to the front of your clothing before the session begins.

On each of six large index cards, write one of the following Scripture references, using a **red** marker: Genesis 1:20-25; Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 104:10-13; Psalm 104:14-18; Psalm 104:19-23; Psalm 104:24-30.

On the other side of each card, write one of the following references in **blue**: Deuteronomy 25:4; Psalm 36:6; Genesis 6:7; Leviticus 24:21; 1 Corinthians 15:39; Genesis 9:2, 3.

Have ready a sheet of blank paper and a felt marker for each

group of four people. Also have masking tape or tacks to use in attaching paper to the walls.

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, greet them individually. Instruct each person to make a giant name tag that identifies his or her favorite animal, using yours as an example. Instruct participants to talk with as many people as possible, asking each person they meet to tell why he or she loves the animal identified on the name tag. Encourage people to share some quality or experience that gives that animal a unique place in their affections.

After people have had time to mingle and share their animal stories, ask the class to be seated. Invite volunteers to tell of an intriguing animal they learned about from someone. Be sure to identify the person who originally told of that animal. Besides getting people started thinking about animals, this entry activity should help both you and your class members to get better acquainted with one another.

Into the Word

Introduce this session and the series by briefly noting these points: animals belong to God, animals are inferior to people, animals are to benefit people, animals can teach us valuable spiritual lessons. (Use Russell's book and the "Comments on the Text" above.)

Divide the class into at least six groups of no more than four people

per group. Give each group one of the cards on which you wrote Scripture references. Instruct each group to look up and read the passage marked in **red**, looking for what the comments about animals reveal of God's character.

As the groups work, write at the top of the chalkboard: "Animals Teach Us That God Is. . ." Allow five to seven minutes for the groups to read and talk; then invite a volunteer from each group to share what that group discovered. As each group shares, add its comments to the chalkboard. Expect comments similar to the following:

- Genesis 1:20-25: Creative, innovative, pleased with his work.
- Genesis 1:26-31: Same as above, plus he is more like people than like animals.
- Psalm 104:10-13: Provider, sustainer.
- Psalm 104:14-18: Giver of joy.
- Psalm 104:19-23: Lord of day and night; people and animals.
- Psalm 104:24-30: Wise, Lord of life and death.

Read Psalm 104:31-35 aloud, asking the group to listen for what are appropriate responses for us as we consider the works of God's hand (glorify, sing, praise, meditate, rejoice, and avoid sin and wickedness).

Point out that people and animals are frequently recipients of the same blessing or judgment from God. Well over sixty times the Bible uses phrases such as "men and animals" or "men and beasts"

to show our common existence as created beings.

Instruct each group to turn over the index card they received earlier, look up the reference in **blue**, and work together to create a motto or slogan expressing what they discovered about the relationship between people and animals. Give each group a felt marker and a sheet of paper with which to write their motto.

Allow five to seven minutes for groups to work. As the mottos are finished, provide each group with tape or tacks to mount its motto on the wall. Invite a volunteer from each group to read aloud that group's motto and explain why it is an important truth to understand.

Into Life

Invite the class to suggest guidelines Christians could follow for responsible actions in dealing with the animals God has created. Once you have a representative list of ideas, lead the group in evaluating them by asking questions such as, "Are there any ideas here that you might disagree with?" "Which idea might you be most likely to try?"

After a few minutes of comments, ask each person to select one idea from the list that they intend to implement.

Conclude the session by encouraging people to read *When Life Is a Zoo* in order to gain maximum benefit from this unique study of lessons God wants to teach us through the animals he also loves.

The Ark Parade

Genesis 6–9

Comments on the Text

The story of the flood strikes an interesting balance between the actions God takes and those he expects Noah to take. This pattern is established from the start and continues through the narrative. For example:

“I am going to put an end to all people. . . . So make yourself an ark” (Genesis 6:13, 14).

“I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth. . . . You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures . . .” (6:17, 19).

“I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark . . .” (6:18).

“Two of every kind . . . will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food . . .” (6:20, 21).

“Go into the ark, you and your whole family. . . . And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark . . .” (7:1, 7).

“Come out of the ark. . . . So Noah came out . . .” (8:16, 18).

Noah’s role

The remarkable thing in this continuing pattern is the counterpoint of comments about Noah’s response to God’s instructions:

“Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (6:22).

“And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him” (7:5).

“Male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah” (7:9).

“The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah” (7:16).

God’s purpose was fulfilled because, as God did what he said he would do, Noah followed God’s instructions. Noah followed God’s bidding so closely, that in the description of the animals coming to the ark, Noah’s role and God’s role overlap each other. Twice we are told the animals “came to Noah and entered the ark” (7:9, 15), obviously guided by God, since he had promised that “two of every kind . . . will come to you to be kept alive” (6:20). However, the credit for the animals’ coming to the ark is not given to God, but is twice explained as being the result of Noah’s obedience: “as God had commanded Noah” (7:9, 16).

God has chosen to work among us by responding to our obedience. As long as God was sending the flood, why not create the ark? As

long as God was gathering the animals, why not also gather their food? God has chosen to work through people who will obey his word. God does what only God can do, letting us do the part that we can do.

The example of Noah is all the more remarkable because he stands in total contrast to the rest of his society. He alone "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (6:8). He alone was "blameless among the people of his time" (6:9).

The Role of the Animals

A new beginning. Most obviously, the animals on the ark were to carry on the life of their species. God remained convinced that the creatures he had exulted over at the time of creation were still "good" and worth saving.

Warning of judgment. In addition, the animals added a powerful exclamation point to Noah's long-standing attempts to alert his neighbors to the coming destruction. Surely someone must have noticed the growing menagerie gathering by the monstrous box that Noah and his sons had been building for years. Unfortunately, God's amazing assembly of the animals did not result in anyone's turning from sin. Instead, life went on, oblivious to God's great plan.

Purposeful activity. The animals obviously played an important role in the lives of Noah's family during the more than a year they were shut up in the ark. The Bible's account passes quickly over the daily rounds of work needed to keep the

animals alive and healthy. No mention is made of the attachments Noah made with certain species, scratching this one behind the ear, rubbing another on the flanks, feeding others directly from his hand.

Provision for sin. The seven pairs of clean animals became the means for Noah to offer sacrifices. Noah's offerings were declarations of thanksgiving for having been protected throughout that great disaster. Noah's worship was more than an expression of feelings, more than a verbal response. Noah offered "some of all the clean animals and clean birds" (8:20). These were not token offerings from a vast herd, but selected animals from a small group of survivors. Noah's willingness to sacrifice any of these animals is a tribute to his trust in God's provision. The God who had brought the animals to the ark, the God who had sustained them all in the ark, was certainly the God who could protect his creatures as the earth was repopulated. Could the reason that we do not see the restoration of God's design to the degree that we desire be attributed to our lack of faith in what we offer to him? Could we be holding on too tightly to our resources, our careers, our families, reluctant to offer them to God in sufficient measure out of fear that such a gift might leave us in want? The example of Noah and his animals is of great value in learning how God has chosen to work in our world.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

God used animals in his plan to restore the earth to his original intention.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . .

1. Describe the conditions that led to the judgment of the flood in Noah's day.
2. Explore the role of the animals in God's plan of restoration.
3. Consider specific ways he or she can be used by God in restoring some area of life to God's original intention.

Before the Lesson

Divide the chalkboard (or marker board) into two sections. Across the top of one section, write the words, "The hardest thing Noah had to do was. . . ." Across the top of the other section, write, "If I had been Noah, I would have...." Provide chalk or markers for people to use.

Into the Lesson

Welcome people as they arrive. If anyone was not present at the first session, give them a little extra attention, and explain the basic direction of the series.

Call attention to the unfinished statements on the board. Guide each person to write a completion phrase for one or the other of the statements.

When you have collected a fair sampling of completions, invite

people to be seated. Select several people to read aloud the completions to first one statement and then the other.

Ask for a show of hands of those who feel the story of Noah and the ark is primarily for children. Point out that while children love this story because of all the animals (a good reason why adults enjoy it also), there are many features of this event that children do not easily comprehend. Therefore, this session will be an adult level view of the events surrounding the flood, but still focusing on those adorable animals.

Into the Word

If someone had written that Noah's hardest job was gathering all the animals, point out that that wasn't Noah's job at all! (If no one wrote that, comment that you are surprised no one did.) Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 6:20 where God tells Noah exactly how the animals are going to be corralled. Ask two other people to read aloud 7:8, 9 and 7:15, 16 to learn how it all happened. Comment that God gathered the animals, something Noah could never have done, because Noah had done everything God had commanded him to do (7:5).

Ask, "What do you think was the response of people to all these animals arriving in Noah's yard?" Call on another person to read aloud Matthew 24:38, 39 to hear how Jesus described the reaction of

Noah's neighbors to Noah's preparations of the ark.

Ask, "What are some warnings that people today often ignore?" List these on the chalkboard or an overhead transparency. Ask, "Why is it so common for people to ignore a warning?" (Nobody wants to hear bad news, we're too busy, we don't want to change our comfortable habit patterns, etc.)

Comment: "The next time you see an animal, think of the animals that paraded through Noah's town—and no one paid any attention. Could there be some warning in your life to which you should respond?"

Point out that Noah and his family were shut up on the ark for more than a year. Ask, "Was the presence of hundreds, probably thousands of animals a blessing or a pain during that year?" Invite opinions, asking people to give a reason for their view. Make sure the point gets made that, while there were certainly times when the animals were a pain, overall they provided two big benefits:

- Meaningful reasons to keep busy. Without all those animals to feed, life on the ark might have been mind-numbing tedium.

- Enjoyment of companionship. Perhaps not all the animals were cute and cuddly, but enough of them must have been at least approachable, sources of pleasure and diversion.

Read aloud Genesis 8:15-22. Ask, what was the significance of Noah

building an altar to the Lord?" Accept the answers people give, then nudge them to recognize the cost and faith that were involved in offering animals to God from among such a small number of surviving animals. Ask, "Was Noah so happy to be out of the ark, that he impulsively sacrificed highly valuable animals that might have been needed to allow each species to flourish?" Guide people to recognize that Noah was willing to offer such costly sacrifices because of his faith in God's provision for the future.

Into Life

Ask the class to suggest various areas of society in general or your community in particular where there is a need for restoration of God's perfect intentions. List these on the chalkboard or overhead.

Divide the class into groups of four. Instruct each group to select one area where restoration is needed, and identify at least three specific actions Christians can take to promote wholeness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

After a few minutes of interaction, invite volunteers to share their group's best idea.

Conclude by challenging each person to think of a specific situation in which there is a need for restoration. Allow thirty seconds for people to think, then lead a time of prayer, asking God to use each person as an instrument of mercy and restoration.

God Will Take Care of You

1 Kings 17:1-6

Comments on the Text

Elijah and the Ravens

What an idyllic scene! We picture Elijah sitting in the shade by a picturesque brook as large graceful birds swoop towards him carrying delicious cuts of meat and loaves of warm, freshly baked bread. So much for idyllic visions.

Ravens are far from being noble, heroic birds. They are scavengers, lumped together with vultures and all the birds of prey as "birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable" (Leviticus 11:13-15. See also Deuteronomy 14:12-19.).

Ravens do not appear often in the Bible, but except for this incident, they are uniformly viewed with loathing. Consider:

"[Noah] sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth" (Genesis 8:7). The raven was obviously content to land on and eat from floating carcasses for more than a week. The dove Noah sent out shortly after was more fastidious, and continued to return to the ark until a suitable landing spot was found (vs. 8-12).

"The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will

be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures" (Proverbs 30:17). This ghastly image parallels the raven and the vulture.

"The desert owl and the screech owl will possess [Edom]; the great owl and the raven will nest there" (Isaiah 34:11). This prophecy pictures the raven as a bird that prefers to remain apart from the busy, active locales where people live and work. The raven seeks the dead, not the living, and is viewed as a grim and dismal symbol.

Only when we are aware of the revulsion that the raven inspired do we gain the full impact of several other places where they are mentioned in Scripture:

"Who provides food for the raven?" (Job 38:41).

"He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call" (Psalm 147:9).

"Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no store-room or barn; yet God feeds them" (Luke 12:24).

The message is clear: God cares not only for the clean, the acceptable, and the approved. He also cares for the unclean, the outcast,

the detestable. Matthew records an event when Jesus taught the same lesson as the Luke 12 passage above, either the same or another situation, but he does not mention the ravens. Instead, the more general phrase, "birds of the air," is used (Matthew 6:26). Reading Matthew's account, we tend to envision Jesus pointing to a cute little songbird twittering in a nearby treetop. It is pleasant to think of God's care for such delightful, appealing creatures. Luke's wording is much more stark, startling us with the idea that God even cares for the unattractive, those outside the boundaries of acceptance.

These are the birds God chose to sustain his prophet. Why would God choose such unlikely emissaries? What possible reason could He have had for this method of provision? The answer is never specifically stated. But many of God's most powerful lessons are not conveyed in words, but in actions. Frequently the Old Testament prophets presented God's message in dramatic, visual form. Keep in mind that when the brook ultimately ran dry, God sent Elijah to a town in Sidon, the land ruled by the father of Ahab's wife, Jezebel.

Sidon was the center of Baal worship, a city totally opposed to the worship of the Lord God. The widow God had selected to sustain Elijah after the ravens were finished was as fully outside the circle of acceptance as were those large, black birds. Would Elijah have accepted food from a woman of Sidon if he had not had to over-

come his distaste for eating food made unclean by being touched by ravens? There is a great parallel between Elijah's experience with the ravens and Peter's vision that prepared him to take the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10; Session 10).

Elijah and Baal

The uncleanness of the ravens was as nothing compared with the degradation of Baal worship. The word *baal* means lord, master, or owner; it was frequently used in reference to people and places. It was sometimes also used in reference to God. At the same time, *baal* referred to local Canaanite deities, the gods of the land and crops. As the people of Israel mingled with the Canaanites, the worship of the Baalim and the worship of God began to be assimilated in the minds and practices of the people. Gradually, there came to be one Baal, a counterfeit god in competition for the worship of Israel. From the founding of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) under Jeroboam, Baal worship grew until it threatened to replace the worship of God.

Not only was Baal worship a threat to supplant devotion to the true God, it was a worship marked by great degradation. Along with the burning of incense and animal sacrifices (similar to that done in worship of God), Baal worship was marked by sexual orgies (1 Kings 14:22-24), wild dancing, mutilation (1 Kings 18:26, 28), and even sacrifices of children offered by their

own parents (Jeremiah 7:30, 31; 19:5).

When Elijah stood in front of King Ahab, he was throwing a direct challenge against the worship of Baal (1 Kings 17:1). First, he announced himself as an official representative of God ("whom I serve"—literally, "before whom I stand"—a commonly used term of service to a ruler). Ahab and the temple priests had been anointed to be God's official representatives, but they had been unfaithful. Elijah was announcing that he had been commissioned in place of the renegade king and priests.

The second part of Elijah's challenge of Baal was his announce-

ment that rain and dew would cease until he gave the word. Baal was supposed to control the elements. He was worshiped by farmers who believed he controlled the rain and the fertility of their crops and herds. Elijah's declaration and the subsequent drought showed that Baal was powerless in the area that he was believed to dominate.

Sadly, even after the drought extended into the third year, the people had still not made up their minds who was truly God. Even after Elijah's dramatic contest with the prophet of Baal (1 Kings 18:16-46), Baal worship continued to plague Israel for years to come.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

God used "unclean" ravens to provide food and encouragement for the prophet Elijah.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Examine Scriptures that describe the nature of ravens and their unsavory reputation.
2. Contrast the known character of ravens with the service they provided for Elijah.
3. Plan a specific way to serve someone in need in the coming week.

Before the Lesson

On a large piece of colorful paper, write, "It's hard to accept help from. . . ." Attach the paper to

a prominent place at the front of the room.

Secure one large index card for each person in the class. Also have felt markers available.

Into the Lesson

Welcome people as they arrive and give each one an index card. Refer to the sign at the front of the room and instruct everyone to write on his card (with felt marker) a type of person from whom it is hard to accept help (in-laws, strangers, etc.). Encourage people to mingle together, comparing what they wrote on their cards and explaining why it is hard to accept help from those kinds of people.

After people have had time to talk together, ask them to be seated and place their index cards directly

in front of them (on the table or floor). Invite volunteers to tell the class what they wrote on their cards and why they find it hard to receive help from those persons. As each person shares, write on the chalkboard or overhead the category of people mentioned. Ask for a show of hands of those who had written the same or a similar category. Write the number of responses next to the category.

When all the categories have been mentioned, introduce the topic of this session: "Receiving and giving help and encouragement are sometimes hindered by our attitudes toward other people. Today we are going to look at a man of God who desperately needed help and received it from a source far more difficult to accept than any we've mentioned thus far. The lessons we'll learn from the story of Elijah and the ravens will make a difference in how we respond to both helping others and receiving help from others in the future."

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of four. Write on the chalkboard or overhead the following five Scripture references, and assign one to each group.

Leviticus 11:13-15

Deuteronomy 14:12-14

Proverbs 30:17

Isaiah 34:11

Revelation 18:2

Instruct each group to examine its passage to discover what it says about the nature of ravens.

Allow four or five minutes for groups to read and talk, then invite volunteers from each group to share their discoveries. Instruct the class to keep in mind the unsavory reputation of ravens.

Present a brief lecture on the religious situation in Israel when Elijah appeared. Use the material in *When Life Is a Zoo* and in the "Comments on the Text" section above to acquaint people with the ongoing conflict between worship of God and worship of Baal. Ask the class to add this information about Israel and Baal to the information they have been storing about ravens.

Select four people who read aloud well and assign them to read 1 Kings 16:29-33; 17:1-6. Have two people alternate reading the narrative verses, another person to read the words of Elijah, and the fourth person to read the words of the Lord.

At the conclusion of the reading, ask: "What do you think was Elijah's reaction when God said, 'I have ordered the ravens to feed you'?"

After several people comment, ask the class to close their eyes for a few moments and try to visualize the scene described in 1 Kings 17:6 when Elijah first received food from the ravens. After a few moments, invite volunteers to share their mental images. Point out that theories about the meat and bread the ravens brought have ranged all the way from a special menu provided by God (similar to His provision of manna in the wilderness) to

the carcasses ravens naturally polished off. As revolting as that latter thought is, the simple fact of ravens having touched the food was enough to turn the stomach of an observant Jew such as Elijah.

To contrast the known character of ravens with the remarkable service they provided for Elijah, explain the three lessons described in *When Life Is a Zoo*:

- A. The ravens shared against their instincts.
- B. The ravens shared though it was tedious.
- C. The ravens shared without recognition.

Point out that there are three other places where ravens are mentioned in the Bible. In these references, we learn one other important lesson. Ask for volunteers to read aloud Job 38:41; Psalm 147:9; and Luke 12:24. Ask, "Knowing what we know about ravens, what lesson do we learn from these verses?" (God cares not only for the clean, the acceptable, and the approved. He also cares for the unclean, the outcast, the detestable.)

Ask: "Considering all we have learned about ravens, why do you think God chose them—instead of angels, or devout Jews, or a clean

bird like the dove—to help Elijah?" Accept people's ideas; then guide them to see how God was preparing Elijah to go to Sidon to receive further help from outside the boundaries he was used to observing. In the example of the ravens, we see that there are no limits to where God's love and mercy can reach.

Into Life

Call attention to the index card each person completed at the beginning of the session. Ask, "Compared to the ravens, how undesirable would it be to receive help from the people described on your card? What about giving help to those people?"

Distribute blank paper and pencils to everyone. Instruct them to work independently to write a description of a specific way to either serve someone in need or to accept help from someone in the coming week. Encourage people to think particularly of a person who fits the description on their index cards.

If time permits and the group seems responsive, invite the small groups to share at least the general idea of their plans with each other.

Close the session in prayer.

Do You See What I See?

Numbers 22

Comments on the Text

As background to this incident, it is helpful to be familiar with the history of Moab and Midian, which joined together to try to stop Israel from advancing into Canaan in the last year of Israel's long journey through the desert. As Israel approached their final destination, they were refused passage through Edom (Numbers 20:14-21) and overcame attacks from the Canaanites (21:1-3), the Amorites (vs. 21-32) and Bashan (vs. 33-35). It was at this point that they arrived at the plains of Moab, stimulating the Moabites and Midianites to join forces in seeking to defeat Israel without risking a battle. Their weapons were sorcery and deceit.

Moab

Located near the Dead Sea, the Moabites were the descendants of Lot's grandson, born through incest of Lot's older daughter (Genesis 19:30-38). Little is heard of this people until Moses and the Israelites advanced through their territory, camping beside the Jordan. Because of Moab's opposition, Moses later declared that "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants

may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation" (Deuteronomy 23:3).

Trouble with Moab continued through the years. Nearly 100 years after the incident with Balaam, Eglon, king of Moab, organized a confederacy with the Ammonites and Amalekites and subdued Israel for eighteen years.

There were also years during the period of the judges when relations between the two countries were stable. This was the situation surrounding the events of the book of Ruth, a Moabite woman who became an ancestress of David, and part of the bloodline of the Messiah.

When King Saul was seeking to kill David, David took his parents to Moab and placed them under the protection of Moab's king.

The strength of Moab was broken when Jehoram, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom laid waste to the land (2 Kings 3). Various messages of judgment and doom are pronounced upon Moab by prophets such as Amos (2:1-3), Isaiah (15, 16), Ezekiel (25:8-11), Jeremiah (48) and Zephaniah (2:8-11).

Midian

Midian was one of Abraham's sons by Keturah (Genesis 25:1-6), whom Abraham probably married after the death of Sarah and the marriage of Isaac. She is also called his concubine (1 Chronicles 1:32). The traders who carried Joseph to Egypt are called both "Ishmaelites" and "Midianites" (Genesis 37:25-28, 36). The descendants of Midian and those of Ishmael (the son of Abraham and the servant, Hagar) intermarried and the names are used interchangeably (Judges 8:22-26).

Forty years before Israel escaped from Egypt, Moses had fled to the land of Midian. He befriended the family of Jethro (Reuel), and married his daughter, Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-21). Jethro, called a priest of Midian, gave wise counsel to Moses about the administration of the Israelites. His son Hobab served as a guide in traveling through the wilderness (Numbers 10:29-32), and settled with the men of Judah (Judges 1:16). There is no indication that either man was involved in the Midianite collusion with Moab. However, Heber, one of Hobab's descendants, evidently allied himself with the king of Canaan and aided Sisera in preparing to battle Barak and Deborah (Judges 4:11, 12).

The most infamous period of Midianite history is their brutal subjection of Israel and defeat at the hands of Gideon (Judges 6-8). Psalm 83 links the defeat of Midian

with that of Sisera and Jabin (vs. 9-12), strengthening the view that at least some Midianites had assisted the Canaanites in opposing the army of Deborah and Barak.

Balaam

We find ourselves cheering on the donkey when she confronts Balaam and unexpectedly speaks the truth. However, it is sad to know that Balaam learned little from the encounter with the donkey and the angel (Numbers 22:21-35). He did pronounce blessings on Israel as God's Spirit came upon him (Numbers 23 and 24). Immediately afterwards, however, he was the instigator of a plot to get Moabite and Midianite women to seduce the men of Israel into participating in the pagan fertility rites of Baal (Numbers 25:1-3; 31:8, 16). As a result of his treachery, Balaam was put to death by sword in battle between Israel and Midian.

We must ask, "How can a man see such obvious evidence of God's authority and end up plotting to destroy the worship of God by seducing Israel into idolatry?"

Was it greed? Was Balaam so steeped in his sorcery and idolatry that he could not tell what was genuine and what was not? Or had his soul become warped to the point that, even when he recognized God's power, his deepest instinct resisted? Whatever it was that ruined this unusual man, his donkey remains honorably etched in our memories.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Just as God spoke through a donkey to communicate his truth, so he can speak through anyone.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Discover three lessons about spiritual truth from the story of Balaam's donkey.
2. Make a list of friends, relatives, and acquaintances who need someone to lovingly speak God's truth to them.
3. Pray for someone who needs to hear the good news of God's love.

Before the Lesson

Arrange chairs in circles of no more than five or six chairs each. On the chalkboard or overhead transparency, write the following instructions: "Tell the people in your circle of a time when someone gave you a warning. (Be prepared for someone in your group to ask whether or not you heeded the warning!)"

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, guide them to a circle of chairs. To avoid having anyone be the only person sitting in a circle, start a new circle with two or three people rather than having them fill up an existing group.

Call attention to the instructions you prepared and encourage people to enjoy telling stories on themselves. Be prepared to share an

experience of your own if the group seems slow at getting started.

Give a two-minute warning so that everyone gets a chance to tell at least part of his or her story. Then instruct the groups to take an additional minute to select one story from the group to share with the rest of the class in sixty seconds or less. Proceed randomly among the groups in calling on each chosen storyteller.

When the stories have been told, ask for a show of hands to indicate those who did not heed the warnings they told about. Ask again for a show of hands of those who did heed their warning. Then ask, "Did how you felt about the person giving the warning have anything to do with your response?" Invite several people to respond.

Introduce today's topic by inviting the class to explore one of the most unusual beings God ever used to warn someone: a donkey.

Into the Word

Introduce the story of Balaam by presenting the background leading up to King Balak's summons of Balaam to put a curse upon Israel. Tell the story of Balak's attempts to get Balak to come to him (Numbers 22:1-20).

Instruct people to turn back to their circles and, as groups, read the account of Balaam's donkey (vs. 21-35), looking for answers to these four questions:

1. Why was God angry at Balaam since he had given permission

for Balaam to go with Balak's men?

2. Why do you think the donkey saw the angel and Balaam did not?
3. Which miracle appears greater: opening the donkey's mouth or opening Balaam's eyes?
4. What do you think was accomplished in Balaam's encounter with the donkey and the angel?

As people read, write the questions on the chalkboard or overhead. Allow seven or eight minutes for groups to read and talk; then invite volunteers to share their insights to the four questions. While no definitive answer is given, most commentators tend to answer as follows:

1. God was evidently angry because he knew Balaam did not really intend to do what God told him. Balaam would do whatever seemed most profitable at the moment.

2. Perhaps the angel only revealed himself to the donkey at first. Or, perhaps Balaam was so spiritually blind (or focused on his sorcery) that he was the only one who wouldn't have seen the angel.

3. Comparing these miracles may be a little like asking which wing of an airplane is more important? We are obviously most intrigued by the donkey's speaking, but perhaps we should be more concerned about what it takes for any of us to become aware of God's presence in our world.

4. Balaam was given a chance to commit to God's side. Unfortu-

nately, he only went along to a point, ultimately desiring to be on Moab's side rather than Israel's.

Present a brief lecture using information in *When Life Is a Zoo*, explaining the three lessons about spiritual truth that are gained from the story of Balaam's donkey. List the three points on the chalkboard or overhead as you present them.

Encourage the class members to think of the Balaams in their own lives—people they know who need someone to lovingly speak God's truth to them. Distribute half sheets of paper and pencils for people to use in listing names of friends, relatives, and acquaintances who, like Balaam, have not chosen God's way, but are living by society's codes and values.

Into Life

Instruct people to return to the circles where they began the session. Ask each person to select one person from his or her list of names, and then give a fifty-word or fewer description of that person to the group. They should not identify the people so precisely that others may know who they are; just enough to let others be able to pray for them.

Have the groups spend time in prayer. Have everyone pray for the person to the left, praying for opportunities to share the good news of God's love with the person described.

Facing the Lions

Daniel 6

Comments on the Text

Daniel

The life of Daniel is one of the most remarkable in Scripture. He was born during the tumultuous final years of Judah's existence. At age seventeen he was taken captive to Babylon, where he was trained to serve in the king's palace. During his lifetime, he served and survived a series of Babylonian kings. Perhaps because of his dramatic announcement to Belshazzar that the kingdom was about to be overthrown by the Medes and Persians, he was a highly trusted administrator under Darius the Mede.

Darius

Darius was a common name for Medo-Persian rulers; thus there is some confusion on the precise identity of the king Daniel served. Identification is also complicated by the common practice of rulers' using more than one name, thus being listed differently in various ancient records. Darius the Mede is believed by some to be Cyrus himself, founder of the great Persian Empire. Others contend that he was one of Cyrus's generals, who was appointed to rule over Babylon on Cyrus's behalf. He is identified in

Daniel 9:1 as the son of Xerxes (whose Hebrew name was Ahasuerus), the king of the book of Esther.

The Lions

In ancient times, lions were found throughout the near east from Greece to India. Rulers throughout the entire region commonly maintained a den of lions to use as executioners. The degree to which the lions were kept hungry is shown in their frenzied attack on Daniel's enemies and their families (Daniel 6:24). The violent destruction of the wives and children of these men was done in accord with Persian custom.

Daniel's Protection

It is evident that Darius knew enough about Daniel's faith that he hoped for a miracle. First, as Daniel was thrown among the lions, the king said, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" (Daniel 6:16). Second, the sealing of the entrance to the den (Daniel 6:17) was certainly not intended to keep Daniel and the lions in, but to keep Daniel's enemies out, ensuring that whatever Daniel's God might do

with the lions would not be tampered with by human actions.

Third, the king "hurried to the lions' den" the instant dawn began to break. His haste and his question show his hope, but the anguish in his voice reveals his doubt: Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:19, 20). Notice the repetition of Darius's comment, "your God, whom you serve continually." It was obvious to everyone who knew Daniel that his faith was a constant factor in his life, not just something he would resort to when in trouble.

Daniel's Prosperity

The story concludes with a telling insight into the remainder of Daniel's life: "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius" (Daniel 6:28). The little word, *so* at the start of that statement carries us back to a letter Darius wrote (Daniel 6:25-27), ordering all people in his domain to "fear and reverence the God of Daniel." While on the surface we may attribute Daniel's status to having gained the favor of Darius, it is obvious that favor was due to Darius's awareness of Daniel's close relationship with "the living God."

Daniel's Prayer Life

Daniel's prayer life was used by his enemies to attempt to discredit him. However, it was also the key to his success, not only in escaping from the lions, but also in establishing his prosperity. Everyone who

knows the story of Daniel and the lions knows it was the pattern of Daniel's life to pray three times each day. It is evident that Daniel was fully aware of prophecies made about the restoration of God's people to their homeland.

Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Temple foresaw the captivity and restoration of Judah: "If they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause" (2 Chronicles 6:38, 39).

The description of Daniel's praying given in the story is brief, revealing just two things about his prayers:

- "Giving thanks to his God" (Daniel 6:10). Even as a captive, longing to be restored to his homeland, Daniel's prayer was filled with thanksgiving. The little phrase, "just as he had done before," underscores this as Daniel's common practice.

- "Asking God for help" (Daniel 6:11). Undoubtedly, the help Daniel sought was the end of this captivity.

The book of Daniel records two of Daniel's prayers, giving us further insight into what this man of prayer talked about with his God. In chapter 2, Daniel urged his friends to "plead for mercy from the God of heaven" (Daniel 2:18). When the prayer was answered, Daniel responded with a heartfelt burst of praise: "Praise be to the

name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his" (Daniel 2:20). When his prayer was answered, Daniel did not forget what God had done.

Chapter 9 records a longer prayer of Daniel, offered during that fateful first year of Darius's reign. It is likely that this is a variation of the prayer Daniel offered morning, noon and evening every day in anticipation of the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity would end after seventy years. Daniel's praying was no mere folding of the hands, but a deeply earnest petition from the heart, marked by fasting, sackcloth and ashes, the traditional signs of mourning (Daniel 9:1-3). Daniel's prayer alternated expressions of praise (Daniel 9:4, 7, 9) with confession of his nation's sins (Daniel 9:5,

11). Daniel recounts the sins of the people and God's just punishments for their disobedience (Daniel 9:5-15). Then he presents his petition, asking God to "turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill" (Daniel 9:16). The basis for this petition is the nature of God himself to keep his word (Daniel 9:16) and to show mercy (Daniel 9:18).

As we consider the prayer of Daniel, his humility, his confession, his worship and his petition, is it any wonder that a man who spoke like this with God every morning, every noon and every evening, was a man that God protected and prospered? Here was a man so closely in touch with the living God that even a pagan ruler called his nation to "fear and reverence the God of Daniel" (Daniel 6:26).

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Daniel's life of prayer and obedience were rewarded with protection and prosperity.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Review the story of Daniel, Darius, and the lions.
2. Explore Daniel's prayer life, which contributed to his rescue.
3. Spend time in prayer, following Daniel's example.

Before the Lesson

On the chalkboard, overhead transparency, or a poster, write:

"Welcome to Your Worst Nightmare! Draw or write a description of the animal you would least like to meet in one of your dreams. Prize for most fearsome beast!"

Provide blank paper and felt pens. Also provide a suitable prize for the person who creates the most fearsome beast (a small stuffed animal?).

Have ready a large sheet of paper and felt marker for each group of four people.

Into the Lesson

Welcome people as they arrive. Call attention to the instructions you wrote, and ask each person to

draw or write a description of an animal they fear. As people complete their drawings, instruct them to browse among those being done by others, looking for the one they feel is the “most fearsome.” Encourage people to explain to each other why they chose to draw that particular animal.

When people have had time to visit and compare their frightful animals, ask everyone to be seated, keeping their papers with them. Call for nominations for the “most fearsome” animal, and ask that each nominee be shown to the class. Lead the class in voting and present the grand prize to the winner!

Introduce today’s topic by pointing out that in ancient times, lions were perhaps the most feared of all animals. Thus, the story of Daniel’s surviving the night inside a den of hungry lions has long captured the imagination.

Into the Word

Daniel and the Lions. Lead the class in reviewing the story of Daniel, Darius, and the lions. Divide the class into four sections. If you have more than five or six people per section, subdivide into smaller groups of no more than four or five per group. Assign each section one part of Daniel 6:

1. Verses 1-9
2. Verses 10-15
3. Verses 16-20
4. Verses 21-27

Give each group a large sheet of paper and a felt marker. Instruct them to read their part of the story,

then write a series of at least three newspaper headlines that could have run in the *Babylonia Bugle* if this incident were being covered by the press. The headlines should be done in big, bold letters.

Allow five to seven minutes for groups to read their passage and write their headlines. Starting with Section 1, ask for a volunteer from each group to hold up their paper and read their headlines aloud.

When all groups have reported, read aloud Daniel 6:28 to summarize the story. Point out that Daniel’s prayer life, his close relationship with God, was such an integral part of his life that even his enemies and the Persian ruler were aware of it.

Daniel’s Prayers. Lead the class in discovering why Daniel’s prayer life was so effective in contributing to his rescue. Assign each section of the room one of the following Scriptures:

1. Daniel 2:17-20
2. Daniel 6:10, 11
3. Daniel 6:16, 20, 21
4. Daniel 9:1-3

Instruct the groups to read their verses, looking for insights about the effectiveness of Daniel’s prayer life. Allow up to five minutes for groups to work.

Invite volunteers from each section to share insights their groups gained. Write their comments on the chalkboard. (See the “Comments on the Text” above for insights; compare with the comments from the groups.)

Assign the groups to read the first part of Daniel’s prayer, chapter

nine, verses 4-11a. Explain that you are going to lead the class in reading this part of the prayer responsively, with groups in the first two sections reading Daniel's expressions of praise and worship. The groups in the other two sections will read Daniel's confessions. Allow three or four minutes for groups to read through those verses and identify their assigned part of the prayer.

You may either have all the groups in the first two sections read in unison, and similarly with those in the other two sections. Or you may point to specific groups within sections to read a part. If you have a variety of translations in your class, you may want to designate the one most people have as the one to use. Before beginning the group reading, remind everyone that Daniel prayed this prayer with pleading, fasting and sackcloth. There is obviously deep emotion in both his expressions of praise and his confessions.

Sections 1 & 2: Verse 4

Sections 3 & 4: Verses 5, 6

Sections 1 & 2: Verse 7a

Sections 3 & 4: Verses 7b, 8

Sections 1 & 2: Verse 9a

Sections 3 & 4: Verses 9b-11a

After the reading is completed, call attention to Daniel's petition in verses 16-19. Explain that the request he is making is based on both the justice of God (16) and the mercy of God (18).

Point out that Daniel had great confidence that God would answer because Daniel was asking for God to what God had already promised he would do. Read aloud 1 John 5:14, 15 to emphasize the importance of directing our prayers toward those things that we know are in accord with God's purpose.

Into Life

Lead the class in a time prayer, following Daniel's example. Encourage people to pray aloud within their groups, following the prayer suggestions you make to the whole class. First, offer a brief expression of praise and worship for who God is, then invite people to similarly pray aloud in their groups.

After a few moments, offer a prayer of confession and invite people to do the same in their groups.

Finally, offer a petition and invite the groups to pray for specific requests.

Conclude the session by thanking God for hearing each prayer.

The God of Second Chances

Jonah 1-4

Comments on the Text

Because of our curiosity about this strong-willed preacher and the giant fish that God used so dramatically, we tend to overlook the great insights about God that are revealed in Jonah's story. Jonah intrigues us, the fish fascinates us, and God is somewhat left in the shadows. This session explores some of the attributes of God that are revealed through the actions of Jonah and that fish.

God's Omniscience

We easily see God's great knowledge in Jonah's failed attempt to sail in the opposite direction from the mission God assigned Him. We are vividly reminded of Job's inquiry: "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? . . . God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:20, 23, 24).

Still, in spite of knowing this, how often do we repeat Jonah's error of thinking we know better than God. How often do we emulate Jonah, who fled from going to Nineveh, certain that his hatred of

the wicked, idolatrous Assyrians was preferable to God's merciful warnings? How frequently do we join with Peter in calling unclean those whom God has pronounced free of sin? (See Acts 10.) Do we not knowingly disobey God's many commands to show love and mercy and kindness, not just to our peers, but to all we encounter?

Only by sending the fierce storm, providing that "great fish," and keeping Jonah alive in such an unpleasant prison for three days did God finally convince Jonah to obey.

But it is not certain—even at that point—that Jonah was yet convinced that God truly did know best. Jonah's anger at God's willingness to spare Nineveh (Jonah 4:1-3) shows Jonah's reluctance to believe that God's commands, even when contrary to his own "enlightened reason," could be trusted absolutely. Jonah may have been willing to affirm that God's knowledge was perfect and complete, but when confronted with his own evaluation of a situation, he chose the folly of his own judgment rather than God's.

God's Sovereignty

Jonah thought his ticket to Tarshish put him in control of his own life. The storm and the fish powerfully drove home God's sovereign control of the environment in which Jonah lived. Jonah was able to plan and move in disobedience to God, but God's world is ultimately filled with consequences that are unavoidable when the divine order is abused.

The fish in this story is a fascinating example of one way God's sovereign hand often works in human life. In the first place, the fish obviously saved Jonah from certain death by drowning. In the second place, the intestinal tract of a giant sea creature must have been one of the most repulsive places imaginable for a three-day getaway. Obviously, if Jonah could have chosen his own mode of rescue, he would have preferred a pleasant island harbor sheltered from the storm and perhaps inhabited by sympathetic and attractive maidens, ready to console him after his ordeal.

However, only the terror of the tempest and the foulness of the fish were sufficient to bring Jonah back to obedience. Frequently, it is only the misery of our circumstances that brings us to our senses so that we can see the need for repentance and thus open ourselves to receive forgiveness.

Just as in the case of Joseph's brothers who were caught between famine and Egyptian imprisonment, God repeatedly uses the problems, sorrows, and

tragedies of human life to bring about his good purpose. Looking back, we become able to recognize how the misery led to the miracle, saving us from the ultimate destruction to which our disobedience impels us.

God's Grace

Jonah willingly accepted God's merciful rescue. Although his prayer from within the fish shows his struggle to submit to God's sovereignty, he finally repented (Jonah 2:9). It was then that "the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 2:10).

It was much more difficult for Jonah to accept the provision of God's grace when the Assyrians repented. When God compassionately spared the destruction he had threatened, Jonah "was greatly displeased and became angry" (Jonah 4:1).

Jonah's displeasure erupted again when the plant that had shielded him from the sun was eaten by a worm. Once again God had to take Jonah to task about his priorities: he cared more about his own shade and comfort than the fate of 120,000 of his fellow human beings (Jonah 4:10, 11).

The book ends abruptly without revealing whether Jonah really retained the lessons taught by the fish and the worm. Perhaps it is just as well as we are not told how Jonah responded to God's final rebuke, leaving us to wrestle with our own obedience to God's omniscience, sovereignty, and grace.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

God used a great fish to teach Jonah about God's great knowledge, sovereignty and grace.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Explain three attributes of God that Jonah learned about through his rescue by a fish.

2. Describe ways in which those attributes of God affect his or her own life.

3. Tell God of one area of life in which he or she needs to experience one of those three attributes.

Before the Lesson

On a long table at the front of the room or by the door, place a stack of blank paper and felt pens for each person to use. On an overhead transparency or poster, write these words: "Welcome! What do you remember about Jonah and the Great Fish? On blank paper draw one scene you recall from that story. Stick figures OK." Have masking tape or tacks available for people to use in attaching completed drawings to the walls.

Into the Lesson

Welcome people as they arrive. Refer them to the poster or overhead with the instructions to draw a scene from the familiar story of Jonah. Encourage people to work at the table provided, using the time to talk with other people about Jonah's adventure. Keep this

time lighthearted so that no one is threatened about revealing limited artistic abilities.

As drawings are finished, instruct people to tape or tack them to the walls, trying to place them in an approximate chronological order. Pictures of the same scene should be clustered together. As additional drawings are displayed, it may be necessary to move some of those already on the wall.

When all the drawings are finished, invite volunteers to tell the story of Jonah, using the pictures on the walls as a guide. Seek to involve as many people as possible in the storytelling, stopping people after a few sentences and asking someone else to pick up from there. If any significant incidents are not pictured, the storytellers will need to describe what happened in those gaps. If a storyteller gets off track or cannot remember what happened next, ask the class to chime in with the correct information. Assure people that no one will be expelled from the class if they forget the details of Jonah's story—especially since one of the prerogatives of being adults is being able to forget some of the details of our own lives, to say nothing of the lives of people who lived over 2500 years ago.

When the story is completed, ask, "How many of our pictures have Jonah in them?" (Probably almost all of them will.) "How many pictures have the fish in them?" (Probably a significant number

will.) "How many pictures have God in them?" (Probably very few, if any.) Comment: "Besides the fact that it is probably easier to draw Jonah or the fish than to draw God, it is interesting how our view of this story is so strongly affected by the character of Jonah and the size of that fish. At the same time, God, who is really the main character in the story, is pushed to the background of our awareness. This session will focus on three important attributes of God seen in this story.

Into the Word

Divide the class into three sections. Instruct everyone to find a partner within his own section. If there is an uneven number of people in a section, either have the extra person join a neighboring section or form a group of three.

Assign each section one of attributes of God illustrated in the incident with the fish: Knowledge, Sovereignty, Grace. Instruct the pairs to read together Jonah 1:17-3:5, looking for evidence of that attribute. Point out that we learn much about God from his response both to Jonah's rebellion and to his obedience. Encourage people to envision the scene, using the text to look into the scene and consider God's actions.

Allow seven to ten minutes for people to read and talk. As they work, write the three attributes across the top of the chalkboard or an overhead transparency. Then invite volunteers from each section to share what they found. As they talk, write under the appropriate

heading any key words or phrases people use that help explain each of these attributes of God.

Point out that it is one thing to know about these attributes of God and another thing to conduct our lives accordingly. Ask for volunteers to suggest ways in which these three attributes of God affect our lives. Ask questions such as the following:

- "What difference does it make for us to know God is omniscient?"

- "How might we modify our priorities this coming week if we seriously considered God's sovereignty over all of life?"

- "What attitudes towards other people might we change if we really came to grips with the fact that God's grace is available for them as well as for us?"

- "What people in our community might be the emotional equivalents to us that the Assyrians were to Jonah? Who might be people we would find it hard to accept as recipients of God's grace?"

Read aloud Jonah 3:10-4:4. Be sure to read Jonah's outburst (4:2, 3) with expression. Ask, "Why was Jonah angry?" "Why did God challenge Jonah's right to be angry?"

Into Life

Ask each person to select one area of life in which he needs to experience one of those attributes of God. After a few moments of silent reflection, lead the class in a time of silent prayer, with each person asking God to help him to live in that area of life with full awareness of God's true character.

Worry Is for the Birds

Matthew 6:25-34

Comments on the Text

We have already looked at Jesus' reference to birds in the Sermon on the Mount (Session 3). We noticed that the parallel account in Luke referred to *ravens*, those unpleasant and despised scavengers God chose to use to feed the prophet Elijah.

In Matthew, Jesus tells us to "Look at the birds" (6:26), while in Luke, Jesus says "Consider the ravens" (12:24). We are not being told to imitate them, just to pay attention and learn from them, to let our feathered friends help us discover the secret of overcoming worry. By pointing out that birds "do not sow or reap or store away in barns," Jesus is not encouraging us to stop working or to avoid planning. Jesus is not opposed to commerce. He is making the point that those endeavors, as important as they are, are not the determining factors in our success. He wants us to know that God cares for those anonymous flying fowls. Far more, he cares for us.

The original word translated "worry" in the NIV ("to take thought" in the KJV) is *merimnao*, to be anxious. It is from a root word (*merizo*), meaning "something that is divided, partitioned, or pulled in

different directions." The visual image of a person who worries is someone who is distracted, anxious, or harassed by conflicting pressures.

Birds, obviously, are not worriers. They do not twist their talons, wondering about tomorrow. They are focused solely on the issue of today's survival. The pagans Jesus mentions later in this section are similarly single-minded in pursuit of their temporal goals. It is the follower of Jesus, the one who has a little bit of faith, who seems caught between God's kingdom and the cares of this world.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus talks about the person who "hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22). Jesus is warning against losing the spiritual benefits of God's kingdom due to focusing desire and energy on gaining the material goods of the world. The parallel Jesus draws between "worries of this life" and "the deceitfulness of wealth" throws an intriguing light on the damage that worry and anxiety does to a person. For the Christian to be fretting over

temporal matters and possessions is to be caught in a fallacy, an illusion that distracts the believer from the eternal matters that deserve priority attention.

Jesus' instruction not to be given over to worry about things of this life follows immediately after his teaching against storing up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-24). The parallel passage in Luke is preceded by the parable of the rich fool, concluding with the chilling

statement, "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:15-21). The thread that runs through the entire discourse, tying together each visual image (treasure, birds, lilies, pagans), is summarized in Jesus' famous command of what to do instead of worrying: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Worry is a serious sin that needs to be diagnosed and cured.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Evaluate his own response to the six main causes of worry.
2. Based on Jesus' reference to birds, write advice to a friend who is pressured by worry.
3. Encourage each other in dealing with situations that cause concern.

Before the Lesson

Write the following on the chalkboard:

GIANT WORRY SURVEY

The Biggest Area of Worry for Most People I Know Is . . .

- Money
- Politics
- Family
- Appearance/Health
- Environment
- Foreign Affairs
- Sports

Include two or three well known current local issues in the list and leave space for people to add other categories.

Copy one of each of the areas of worry in large, bold letters on a separate sheet of colored construction paper. Have available several blank sheets of paper and felt markers for adding any new categories.

Write on an overhead transparency or a poster the six causes of worry presented in *When Life Is a Zoo*:

- Temperament
- Affluence
- Media
- Experience
- Pace of Life
- Lack of Faith in God

Provide two blank sheets of paper and a pencil for each class member.

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, direct them to the chalkboard and ask them to

make a tally mark in front of the category they feel is the main area of worry for most people they know. Encourage them to add another category if none of those listed fit their friends' worries.

As soon as the first person marks a category, give him or her the sheet of paper identifying that area of worry. Encourage that person to "lobby" those who have not yet marked the survey, telling them reasons why that particular category is so fraught with worry. Each additional person who marks the same category then joins the person with the sign, aiding in their lobbying efforts. It may be necessary to assign the "lobbyists" for different categories to different areas of the room to allow space for the uncommitted to make their choice.

Much of the value (to say nothing of the fun) of this arrival activity is to stimulate people to think and feel about the sources of worry in their lives and our society. Encourage the lobbyists to think of and express all the dire problems that could occur in their area. You may need to lend some support to individuals or groups who select categories different from the majority of the group.

After a few minutes of intense lobbying activity by the groups, call the session to order. Invite a representative of each category to tell in thirty-five words or less why people worry about that area of life. Begin with the categories with the fewest people, and encourage class members to feel free to switch

to another group based on the statements made.

After all groups have presented their cases, introduce today's topic: "Now that we have discovered all these things about which people worry, we are going to look at Jesus' clear instructions that we are not to worry about anything. We will look specifically at his use of birds to illustrate this point."

Into the Word

Give each person a blank sheet of paper and a pencil. Instruct them to fold and then tear their paper into six equal strips. Explain that they are to write on each strip one of the six main causes of worry that are mentioned in the textbook, *When Life Is a Zoo*. Uncover the transparency or poster one item at a time as you present a brief lecture, explaining the six causes discussed in the book. As you talk, people write the causes on their paper strips. Be sure that you discuss each cause in terms of how it may affect the people present in the room, not as a problem that only confronts "other people." For example, very few people consider themselves to be "affluent," but vast numbers of people worry about protecting or improving their standard of living, especially in difficult economic times.

Instruct each person to evaluate his or her own response to the six main causes of worry. Ask everyone to place the strips in order based on how much they feel each cause affects them. "Put the one that affects you most on top, and

the one that bothers you the least on the bottom." Assure people that putting a slip on the top of the pile is not an admission that they are wracked with worry for that reason, simply that they may be a little more prone to be influenced by that factor than by others.

When everyone seems to have the paper strips in order, mention each cause again, and ask for a show of hands of those who put that one in the top half of their pile; those who made it one of the top two; the top one.

"Having identified some of the things our friends and neighbors worry about, then having thought about some of the factors which cause us to worry, let's look at Jesus' classic instructions to Christians about not worrying." Read aloud Matthew 6:25-34.

Divide the class into groups of four and instruct each group to share ideas of what they feel Jesus wants us to learn about worry from looking at birds. Allow three to five minutes for groups to talk; then invite volunteers to share their insights. The following points should be made:

- Since God cares for birds, he will certainly care for us.
- Birds focus on meeting their immediate needs without worrying about the future. We should focus on meeting our eternal needs without fretting about temporal needs. Christians must learn to make spiritual matters the priority in every area of life.
- "Not worrying" does not mean "not caring." While the birds do

not worry about their food, they are certainly not lazy about it either. (Note the distinction between concern [sees probable difficulties and results in action] and anxiety [sees uncontrollable difficulties and results in inaction]).

Distribute a second sheet of paper to each person. Based on Jesus' reference to birds, each group is to write advice to a friend who is pressured by worry. Suggest that each group select an area of worry and a likely cause to be dealt with in their advice.

Allow five to ten minutes for groups to work, then invite a volunteer from each group to read aloud the letter they wrote.

Into Life

"Now that we have given advice to a friend, it is time to recognize that each of us must deal with the temptation to worry in various areas of our lives."

Instruct pupils to select partners from within their small groups. If there is an uneven number in any groups, assist people in finding partners from other groups. If anyone is still left out, become that person's partner.

Invite each person to share with his or her partner one area of life that causes them concern—perhaps even worry. Instruct the partners to encourage one another in dealing with that situation, seeking to apply what Jesus said about worry.

Close the session by having the partners pray together for each other.

Why Churches Count People

Luke 15:1-10

Comments on the Text

Sheep are the most frequently mentioned animals in the Bible. They were the mainstay of the ancient Hebrew and Arab economies from the days of Abel (Genesis 4:2). Because of their great familiarity and their prominent use in sacrifices, sheep are frequently used in Scripture to represent people. In most cases, the comparisons were not at all flattering:

- "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd" (1 Kings 22:17).

- "You gave us up to be devoured like sheep. . . . We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (Psalm 44:11, 22).

- "Like sheep they are destined for the grave" (Psalm 49:14).

- "We all, like sheep, have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6).

- "When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Recognizing the tendency of sheep to wander, there are numerous references in Scripture to God's loving care for his people, even when they stray from his paths:

- "The Lord is my shepherd, I

shall not be in want" (Psalm 23:1).

- "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart" (Isaiah 40:11).

- "As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock . . . so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered. . . . I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. . . . I will shepherd the flock with justice" (Ezekiel 34:12, 16).

There are two almost identical accounts of Jesus' story of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7 and Matthew 18:10-14). The emphasis of Luke's account is the joy produced by repentance. Matthew's emphasis is on the value of each individual, even a child, in the eyes of God: "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matthew 18:14). Considered together, the crucial point is that God's love actively reaches to bring back to himself any one who is lost.

Repeatedly, Jesus explained that his mission was to reach those in need:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:12, 13).

"So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matthew 22:10).

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).

"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46).

The mission of Jesus Christ has not changed, but sadly, many of his followers have allowed their focus to turn inward. Instead of continually seeking and rejoicing in the finding of the lost, vast numbers of churches are content to maintain programs and emphases that virtually ignore those on the outside. It is significant, and convicting, to notice the shepherd's refusal to be satisfied with the ninety nine.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Jesus' story about a shepherd and a lost sheep shows us four important truths about God's love.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . .

1. Identify four truths about God's love as shown in the parable of the lost sheep.
2. Compare Jesus' attitude toward the lost with that of today's church.
3. Suggest ways of reaching out to someone who needs the good news of God's love.

Before the Lesson

Before class, carefully hide a dollar bill (\$5 will stimulate even

greater enthusiasm) somewhere in the room.

Provide a rope or sturdy twine that will reach across the room from the chalkboard to the opposite wall. Have ready one clothespin or large paper clip for each group of four. Each group will also need a large index card and a felt marker.

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, greet them by name and encourage them to mingle and chat with others. When the majority of your class is in the room, excuse yourself from whatever conversation you are engaged in and write on the chalkboard, an overhead transparency, or a poster: "LOST: One genuinely authentic dollar bill! Please help me find it!"

Call everyone's attention to the notice about the lost money. Ask them to help you search for your lost dollar. After a brief time of searching, announce that you will pay a ten cent reward to the finder. If the money remains unfound, gradually raise the reward until you are offering to let the finder keep the full amount. Once you get to that point you, can drop a few hints to help people narrow their search (i.e., "The last time I remember having it in my hand, I think I was looking through a hymn book." "Wait! It wasn't a hymn book! It was a Bible!") Continue suggesting clues until someone finds the money.

Ask, "Did anyone notice any difference in the intensity of the search from the time I announced the money was lost until the time it was found?" (Most likely, there was an increase of interest in finding the money as the reward escalated.)

Introduce today's topic by explaining that you will be exploring one of the most famous stories Jesus told, a story in which something was lost. The lost item was a sheep, and the fate of this lost sheep illustrates humanity's great need to be found.

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of four. Assign each group one of the four truths about God's love that is shown in the parable of the lost sheep and explained in the text, *When Life Is a Zoo*:

1. The Permissiveness of God

2. The Individual Concern of God
3. The Aggressive Pursuit of God
4. The Ultimate Joy of God

Instruct each group to read Luke 15:1-7, looking for evidence of its assigned truth about God. Each group is to answer these three questions:

1. How does the story of the lost sheep show this truth about God?
2. What other evidence have you encountered that shows this truth about God?
3. What significance does this truth about God have for us?

Allow five to seven minutes for groups to read and discuss; then invite volunteers from each group to share their answers to the first question. After every group has had a chance to respond, repeat the same process with the second question, and then the third one.

Assign each group one or two of the following Scriptures to read: Matthew 4:17; Matthew 9:12, 13; Matthew 22:10; Luke 4:18; Luke 7:47; Luke 19:10; John 3:17; John 12:46.

Instruct the groups to look for what their verses say about Jesus' attitude toward those who are lost. Allow three to five minutes for the groups to read and talk; then invite volunteers to share their groups' responses. Write on the chalkboard the key words or phrases that the groups share.

Ask for two volunteers. Have one volunteer stand by the chalkboard and hold one end of the length of rope you provided. Give the other end of the rope to the other volunteer and have him or her move to

the opposite side of the room from the chalkboard. Make this statement: "Let's allow the chalkboard, where [Alice] is standing by the statements you shared, to represent Jesus' attitude of loving concern toward the lost. Let's make the far end of the room, where [Bill] is standing, represent the opposite of Jesus' attitude: total disinterest and unconcern. Now, the attitude of today's church toward the lost is probably somewhere between the two points. Take a moment and think of where on this line between Jesus' attitude and its opposite that you would find the attitude of most Christians today. Do you think most Christians feel just about the same as Jesus does about the lost? Or are Christians totally unconcerned about the lost? Or somewhere in between?"

Allow your two volunteers to lay the rope on the floor and rejoin their groups for a few minutes. As the groups begin to talk, distribute a clothespin (or large paper clip), an index card, and a felt pen to each group. Ask them to write on the card one or more words that describe the attitude of today's Christians toward the lost. Allow three to five minutes for groups to work.

Ask your volunteers to pick up the ends of the rope again, then ask a representative from each group to attach its index card to the rope at the point they feel best represents the attitudes of most Christians today. When all the cards have been attached, starting with the cards furthest from the chalkboard,

ask people seated near the rope to read aloud the words written on the cards.

Ask for people to call out any words they heard that would also apply to Jesus' attitude. Next, ask for them to call out words that would not reflect Jesus' attitude. Then, ask for a show of hands of those who feel that the attitude toward the lost in this particular church would be closer to Jesus' attitude than the cards they placed. How many feel this church's attitude is even further removed from Jesus' attitude?

Finally, ask people to tell why they would place this church's attitude closer to (or farther from) Jesus' attitude. Insist on some specific evidence to support these contentions.

Into Life

Remind people that several sessions ago, they identified and prayed for some people they know who need the good news of God's love. Ask for volunteers to tell about any opportunities they have had since then to show God's love to the person they prayed for. Or, has anything happened in those people's lives to further indicate their need for the good news? As people share, ask the class to suggest ways of reaching out to the person just mentioned.

If time permits, have people return to their groups and tell one another about a person who needs the good news. Group members then share ideas of ways to reach out to the people mentioned.

Who's a Chicken?

Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75

Comments on the Text

All four Gospels tell us of Jesus' upper room warning to his disciples that they would abandon him. All four Gospels tell us of Peter's firm declaration that he would never do so. And all four Gospels tell us of Peter's ignominy when questioned in the high priest's courtyard. Why does it always seem that our failures are noticed by everyone and our successes are virtually ignored?

While Peter may have preferred that this story had been given less coverage, the rest of us rejoice in discovering the great lessons of Peter's failure and restoration. The fact that all four accounts include this story simply underlines the importance to all of us that we need to be on guard against Satan's attacks, and we can count on God's forgiveness when we confront our failures.

Having four accounts of the narrative raises some intriguing issues, since each one shows us slightly different details that we would have missed if reading only one.

Luke and John, in describing Jesus' warning that his disciples would fall away, focus more directly on Jesus' comments to Peter. The tone of their accounts of this

dialogue is very warm and supportive, revealing Jesus' deep affection for Peter. Luke also tells us that Jesus had prayed specifically for Peter, both for his faith in the coming challenge he would face and for his ministry to the other disciples later.

In the account of Peter's denial, Mark, Luke, and John all tell us about the fire in the courtyard where Peter warmed himself. John lets us know that he was also there, and was the one who helped Peter gain access. It was John's intervention that evidently triggered the servant girl's association of Peter with Jesus.

Luke and John indicate there were significant time intervals between the three denials. John is the only one who tells us Peter was recognized as having been with Jesus earlier that evening. Luke is the only one who reveals that Jesus, evidently being led out of Caiaphas's house at the moment the rooster crowed, looked down at Peter in the courtyard, adding even greater grief to Peter's raw emotions.

Some manuscripts of Mark's account have the rooster crowing twice.

These small differences in the four accounts give us a fuller view of these dramatic events. At the same time, the four accounts are so thoroughly in agreement that they reaffirm the veracity of the inspired record, testifying to the accuracy of the reports of what happened that fateful night.

**Peter's Failure:
A Radio Drama**

NARRATOR: The night that Jesus and his closest friends celebrated the Passover together in a borrowed upper room, Jesus warned his friends that they would abandon him.

JESUS: This very night you will all fall away on account of me.

PETER: Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.

JESUS: I tell you the truth, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

PETER: Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

NARRATOR: Then Jesus and his friends went to a place called Gethsemane. While Jesus prayed, and his friends slept, a crowd arrived, armed with swords and clubs. They were led by Judas.

JUDAS: The one I kiss is the man; arrest him. Greetings, Rabbi!

JESUS: Friend, do what you came for.

SOLDIER: That's the one! Grab him men!

PETER: Oh, no you don't.

NARRATOR: Peter pulled out a sword and tried to rescue

Jesus. Valiantly, he attacked, and cut off one man's ear.

JESUS: Put your sword back in its place. Am I leading a rebellion that you have come with swords and clubs to capture me?

SOLDIER: Enough! The Sanhedrin wants to hear your defense. Let's go, men. To Caiaphas's house!

NARRATOR: All of Jesus' friends deserted him and fled. After Jesus was taken inside the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, Peter slipped into the courtyard below. As he sat, a servant girl approached him.

GIRL #1: You were with Jesus of Galilee.

PETER: I don't know what you're talking about.

NARRATOR: Peter moved out to the gateway, and after a short time another girl saw him.

GIRL #2: This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.

PETER: I swear, I don't know the man!

GIRL #1: Surely you are one of them.

GIRL #2: Your accent gives you away.

PETER: (Shouting) May God strike me dead if I'm not telling you the truth! I don't know the man.

NARRATOR: At that moment, a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered that Jesus had said Peter would disown him three times before the rooster crowed. Then Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

After Peter denied Jesus, the crowing of the rooster confronted Peter with four important spiritual lessons.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Re-enact the events of Peter's failure.
2. Identify the four spiritual lessons Peter learned after the rooster crowed.
3. Thank God for his forgiveness when we fail.

Before the Lesson

Duplicate seven copies of page 42, "Peter's Failure: A Radio Drama." (If you have someone in the class who plays the piano, guitar or other instrument, enlist that person to provide a musical background for this drama.)

OPTION: In another room, provide a tape recorder, microphone, and blank tape.

Write on the chalkboard, an overhead transparency, or a poster: "Ask at least three people to tell you about a time when they got a second chance to do something after not succeeding the first time."

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, enlist seven people to participate in the radio drama: Peter's Failure. Assign each of them one of the seven parts. Instruct the "actors" to work together in a corner of the room (or

an adjoining room) to rehearse the play once or twice.

OPTION: Have the actors record the drama in another room.

While the drama is being rehearsed, call other people's attention to the instructions you wrote. Get them started telling one another of a time when they were given a second chance.

After several minutes of group interaction (and when the actors have completed their rehearsal), ask everyone to be seated. Ask for a show of hands of those who. . . .

- were able to think of a time they got a second chance.
- feel that second chance was good for them.
- are grateful to the person who made the second chance possible.

Introduce today's topic with this comment: "A second chance means something went wrong with the first chance. Today we are going to look at a time when God used a rooster to confront Peter with his greatest failure, and begin the healing that made possible one of the most dramatic second chances in history."

Into the Word

Introduce the actors who will re-enact the events of Peter's failure. Invite the "audience" to imagine themselves back in the golden days of radio dramas. Suggest they follow along in their Bibles in Matthew 26:31-35, 47-57, 69-75.

OPTION: Play the recording made by the actors, giving people a

little more of the feel of listening to a radio drama.

After the presentation, ask the following questions:

- Why do you think Jesus told his friends they would abandon him?

- Why do you think Peter objected to the idea that he would act in a cowardly manner?

- Bob Russell, author of *When Life Is a Zoo*, contends that Peter made a mistake in going into the courtyard, putting himself alone on the enemy's territory. What are some ways Christians today put themselves at risk in enemy territory? How can we determine whether or not to enter such an "at risk" situation? How can a Christian defend against Satan's attacks when in an at risk situation?

- Before the rooster crowed, how might Peter have tried to defend his statements of denial?

People may not all agree in their responses to these questions. It is not necessary to bring everyone to the same point of view on these matters, simply to stimulate them to think serious about them in preparation for exploring the four spiritual lessons Peter learned after the rooster crowed.

Divide the class into groups of four. Assign each group one of the four lessons that *When Life Is a Zoo* draws from the rooster calling Peter back to his senses:

1. God's warnings are always true.
2. Every person has limitations.
3. Sin always brings pain.
4. Failure does not have to be final.

Explain that it is one thing to read or hear these statements, or even to agree with them. It is a very different thing for those statements to make an impact on our thoughts, our feelings, and our behaviors.

Instruct each group to discuss the significance of its assigned lesson and then design a poster that communicates that lesson in a manner that catches attention and stimulates thought. They may use words, symbols, pictures, or any combination thereof to give emphasis to the point being made. Provide large sheets of paper or poster board, plus felt markers for the groups to use.

OPTION: If you have more than one group per lesson, have half of the groups work on the poster project while the other half writes accounts of contemporary examples that illustrate the assigned lessons.

Allow at least ten minutes for groups to work; then invite a volunteer from each group to present the group's handiwork.

Into Life

Point out that human nature is prone to judge and condemn most failures, both in others and in ourselves. Only in our relationship with Jesus Christ do we find full pardon for those failures.

Lead the class in a time of prayer in which people thank God for his forgiveness when we fail. Encourage people to express thanks for particular areas of life in which they have experienced God's forgiveness.

The Kosher Question

Acts 10

Comments on the Text

In most of the preceding sessions, we have learned important lessons from individual animals (Jonah's great fish, Balaam's donkey, Peter's rooster) and groups of similar animals (Daniel's lions, Elijah's ravens). In the text for this session, we are not told how many animals are involved, nor even what kinds they were. Instead of seeing specific types of animals, we see a miscellaneous collection that includes "four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air" (Acts 10:12). We discover that at least some of the animals in question were considered unclean in Jewish life and were not to be eaten.

The distinction between clean and unclean animals goes back at least to the time of Noah, when God instructed him to bring seven pairs of every clean animal into the ark (Genesis 7:2). In Leviticus 11, we discover the characteristics that distinguish the clean and unclean animals. At the end of that chapter, we read an exhortation that underlines the importance of this dietary observation: "You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may

be eaten and those that may not be eaten" (Leviticus 11:47).

This was no one-time, optional suggestion, but a matter of central importance to Jewish belief and identity. We see this command given emphasis when it was repeated following an extensive listing of other health-related issues (childbirth, skin diseases, mildew, bodily discharges) and miscellaneous laws: "You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground—those which I have set apart as unclean for you" (Leviticus 20:25).

While many of the Jewish dietary laws could be justified for their health benefits, their major purpose was clearly to reflect the holiness of God. After describing the characteristics of the unclean and clean animals, God pointedly told Moses and Aaron the reason for these regulations: "I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on the ground....

therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44, 45). God wanted the Israelites never to forget either the holiness of God or their unique relationship with him. At every meal, the dietary rules would remind them of this key theme, which is sounded repeatedly throughout Leviticus. (The word *holy* is used over seventy times in Leviticus, more than in any other book in Scripture.)

When we understand the emphasis the dietary laws were given in Jewish life, and the sacred purpose for their observation, we appreciate Peter's reaction to the very idea of eating the animals in his vision.

Sadly, a lifetime of making distinctions between clean and unclean animals led many Israelites, Peter included, to make similar distinctions among people. The Jews tended to see themselves, not only as distinct from, but also as better than, the Gentiles. This attitude of categorizing outsiders as unclean was not reflecting the original spirit of the Mosaic law. Repeatedly, from Exodus through Deuteronomy, the "alien" is linked with the Israelite in sharing God-given responsibilities and privileges:

"The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you" (Exodus 12:49).

"The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34).

"The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien

living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the alien shall be the same before the Lord" (Numbers 15:15).

In spite of these clear statements of God's concern for the Gentiles, it is easy to see the logic and emotion involved in Jews' wanting to avoid contact with anyone who might render them ceremonially unclean. Seeking to obey the commands to avoid touching anything that is unclean (Leviticus 5:2, 3; Numbers 19:22) could lead a person to lose sight of God's concern for the alien. It has always been hard for God's people to hate sin without also hating the sinner. This is the reason Jesus was criticized for his associations with people known to be sinners (Luke 7:39; 15:2).

For Peter to eat an unclean animal would require a complete reversal of all his previous life patterns in approaching food. For Peter to enter the home of a Gentile, especially a Roman soldier, required powerful confirmation that such was God's purpose. God provided just such confirmation, ensuring that Peter's deep reservations would be overcome:

- Peter's vision of the animals, which was given three times, powerfully communicated God's perspective. God's command ("Get up, Peter. Kill and eat"—Acts 10:13) and his rebuke of Peter's refusal ("Do not call anything impure that God has made clean"—10:15) drive home the unmistakable message that no people are to be looked down upon.

• Cornelius's devotion, including his practice of praying at the traditional Jewish hour of prayer (Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30), made him the type of person Peter would be more likely to accept.

• The angel's visit to Cornelius, plus his instructions of how to find Peter, set a precedent that Peter could hardly ignore.

• Cornelius's obvious desire to hear God's word signally impressed Peter (10:33-35).

• The spontaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles dramatically affirmed God's acceptance of these non-Jews.

When other believers criticized Peter for entering a Gentile's home and eating food there, Peter recounted his vision, Cornelius's angelic visitor, and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:1-17). As a result, Peter's critics had "no further objections and praised God, saying 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life'" (Acts 11:18).

The New Testament clearly teaches this equality of all people in the eyes of God:

"Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes,

of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith" (Romans 3:29, 30).

"For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Romans 10:12, 13).

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

Similar statements are made in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13 and Ephesians 2:11-22, leaving no doubt that our relationship with God has nothing to do with racial, ethnic, economic, gender, ethical, or social factors. Each person becomes acceptable to God in exactly the same way: "through faith in Christ Jesus."

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Peter's vision of unclean animals shows God does not show favoritism: the gospel is for everyone.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Compare Peter's attitude toward the unclean animals with his attitude toward Gentiles.

2. Consider God's viewpoint toward people who are outside the church.

3. Pray for a specific person who needs to discover God's love.

Before the Lesson

At the front of the room, mount a large sheet of newsprint or butcher paper headed "Marks of Distinction." On a table near this sheet, place several cookie sheets with two or three damp sponges on each sheet. On each sponge, pour a small amount of tempera paint. (You can probably borrow the paint from a children's class.) Also on the table, have a tub or large bowl with soapy water, and a supply of paper towels. Place a waste basket nearby. (Instead of paint and sponges, you may prefer to use several ink pads—with washable ink.)

OPTION: If your room (or your group members' inhibitions) would make it difficult to use the fingerprinting activity (see *Into the Lesson*), provide a variety of felt markers instead of the paint or ink pad and clean-up supplies.

OPTION: Secure a bed sheet and a variety of stuffed animals. Tack the sheet, filled with the animals, in one of the corners of the classroom.

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, invite them to place their fingerprints on the "Marks of Distinction" sheet. Instruct people to be cautious about getting too much paint on their fingers as that will result in "gloppy" fingerprints. Assist people in using the soapy water to wash off the paint or ink. Take advantage of the unusual nature of this opening activity to encourage friendly interaction among people in your class.

OPTION: Instead of "fingerprinting" the pupils, invite them to use felt markers to write their personal signatures on the "Marks of Distinction" sheet.

As people add their personal "marks" to the sheet of paper, encourage them to notice similarities and differences between their "marks" and those of others in the group. Once everyone has had a chance to make his or her "mark," invite comments from group members about similarities and differences they noticed.

After several people have spoken, make this transition into the topic of this session: "One of the great marvels in God's creation of people is that no two of our fingerprints (or signatures) are identical. When we notice these almost insignificant differences, we are struck with the fact that God made each of us to be unique. At the same time, there is a very important way in which God made each of us to be the same. Today we are going to look at how Peter learned from a vision about animals that the gospel of Christ is for everyone."

Into the Word

Divide the class into groups of four. Assign half of the groups to read about Cornelius's visit by an angel: Acts 10:1-8. Assign the remaining groups to read about Peter's vision: Acts 10:9-20. Instruct the groups to find the instructions each man was given. Allow three or four minutes for groups to read.

Request volunteers to tell the class the instructions that had been

given to Cornelius (“Send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.”) and Peter (“Get up, Peter, kill and eat”—three times. “Get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them”).

As background for this incident, assign one or more of the following Old Testament references to the groups that read about Cornelius, having them look for God’s view of non-Jews: Exodus 12:49; Exodus 20:10; Exodus 22:21; Leviticus 19:34; Numbers 15:15.

Assign one or more of the following passages to the groups that read about Peter, asking them to look for insights into Jewish attitude towards eating meat of “unclean” animals: Leviticus 11:47; Leviticus 20:25; Leviticus 11:44, 45; Deuteronomy 14:3; Ezekiel 4:13, 14; Daniel 1:8.

After the groups have had time to read and converse, call for volunteers from each section to tell what they see as the implications of the Old Testament passages for the incident with Peter and Cornelius. Use comments from *When Life Is a Zoo* or the “Comments on the Text” section to clarify or expand their comments.

Read aloud Acts 10:23-28. Then lead the group in discussing these questions:

1. Prior to this incident, how would you compare Peter’s attitude towards the unclean animals with his attitude towards Gentiles?

2. How do you explain the tendency to treat people, for whom God has specifically stated his concern, similarly to unclean animals?

3. How did Jesus balance the seeming conflict between avoiding uncleanness while showing concern for those who were unclean? (See Luke 7:36-50; 15:1, 2; 19:1-10.).

Into Life

On one side of the chalkboard, list the terms used in this session to identify “outsiders”: aliens, Gentiles, sinners, etc. Ask group members to suggest kinds of people whose relationship to us could be comparable to that of the Gentiles and Peter. “What kinds of people do we tend to avoid and find them difficult to accept?” List the suggestions on the other side of the chalkboard.

Ask, “What would we have to do, as individuals and as a church, to reach out to these kinds of people?” Ask each person to think of someone he or she knows who fits one or more of the categories listed. Close with a time of silent prayer, encouraging each person to pray for a specific person who needs to discover God’s love.

Strange Bedfellows

Isaiah 11:6-9

Comments on the Text

The word *peace* in its various forms appears more than 270 times in the Bible. In addition, there are many other places that use similar words (like *calm, quiet, rest, and harmony*). The resolution of anger and conflict is a major theme throughout the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments. None of the explanations or descriptions of the triumph of peace is as vividly memorable as Isaiah's portrait of the peace and safety of Messiah's kingdom in which once ferocious animals will cavort harmlessly with children.

The impact of this peaceful cohabitation of predator and prey is increased when one considers how other Scripture passages portray these animals:

Wolf

"A ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder" (Genesis 49:27); "A wolf from the desert will ravage them" (Jeremiah 5:6).

Leopard

"Like a leopard I will lurk by the path" (Hosea 13:7).

Lion

"Or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me" (Psalm 7:2). "He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless" (Psalm 10:9).

Bear

"Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open" (Hosea 13:8).

Cobra

"Their venom is like the venom of a snake, like that of a cobra" (Psalm 58:4).

Viper

"In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper" (Proverbs 23:32).

The image of these creatures cuddling up with a lamb, a calf, a goat, or a child is strikingly vivid. We anxiously look forward to the day when all of creation is restored to God's perfect intention. Still, it remains difficult for us to allow Christ to bring his peace into our often stormy relationships. The antagonisms we feel toward certain

people seem so “natural” that we strongly resist efforts at making peace. We talk about “justifiable anger” and claim some lofty ideal (like truth or justice) as our concern in continuing to do battle:

“If you only knew what she did to me, you’d be amazed that I’ve been so restrained.”

“I’ve forgiven him, but I’ll never forget.”

“I’ll shake hands with him, but I could never trust him again.”

Is Isaiah’s vision too idyllic? Are reconciliation and peacemaking ideals that must be reserved for the next world? Or can we find in the Bible practical guidance for allowing the Prince of Peace to rule over our anger and hurt feelings?

First Century Demonstrations

The New Testament is very encouraging with its numerous examples of Christ bringing peace in the lives of diverse, contentious people. Bob Russell, in *When Life Is a Zoo*, calls attention to the conflicting backgrounds of Matthew and Simon the Zealot, the opposing personalities of Peter and Thomas, the conflicting natures of Saul and Barnabas, and the deep-seated differences between Peter and Cornelius. We could wish that we were given more details on how these people managed to get along with each other. However, the simple fact that their relationship with Christ really did bring them together is encouraging for us. Just thinking of Matthew and Simon’s being included together among the Twelve lets us know that Jesus

Christ truly can bring peace into the most potentially explosive relationships.

It is also encouraging to notice that the simple fact of following Christ did not make all the potentials for conflict simply disappear. The New Testament does not just show us the successes, but also lets us look behind the scenes to discover the very human struggles that all people must face, even as the early Christians did. Jesus had to deal with arguments among his disciples (Mark 9:33-37). Paul and Barnabas had “such a sharp disagreement that they parted company” (Acts 15:39). These accounts are encouraging in those moments when we have allowed our temper to explode and someone takes offense. It is especially encouraging to read in Paul’s letters that this conflict with Barnabas was later ironed out. Paul had contended that Barnabas’s nephew, Mark, should not accompany them on another journey. Several years after that, Paul wrote to Timothy that Mark “is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

The early Christians were not perfect, but they did discover the great benefit of Paul’s admonition: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15).

The Biblical Path to Peace

Besides the examples of people who found peace instead of conflict, the Bible has many very practical instructions for pursuing

peace in our personal relationships.

1. Recognize that God is a God of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33). It is part of his eternal nature. Peace is not a side issue with God, an option that can be taken or left.

2. Personally make peace with God. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). All of us have tried to live life on our own terms, rebelling against God's perfect plan for us. Once that enmity with God has been ended, it becomes possible for his peace to rule in our hearts. Until then, we remain as rebels, striving to achieve our own goals, fighting against the very nature of God and his world.

3. Acknowledge that our relationships with other people grow out of our inner attitude. "A heart at peace gives life to the body" (Proverbs 14:30). As we allow God's Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts and attitudes, we begin to experience the growth of his peace within us (Galatians 5:22). The converse is also true. James asked, "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" (James 4:1). The cause was not the issues on which people might disagree or the personalities that don't happen to mesh. The cause of quarrels, according to James, is "your desires that battle within you."

4. Recognize that God has called us to live in peace (1 Corinthians 7:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

5. Commit to investing the effort required to live in peace with oth-

ers. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18). "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19). "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). "Make every effort to be at peace with all men" (Hebrews 12:14). While peace may sound like a passively quiet attribute, Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to seek for it actively. Peace between people does not just happen; it must be sought after.

6. Pray earnestly for God's peace to rule. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7. See also 2 Thessalonians 3:16.). Since peace is not a purely human attribute that can be manufactured at will, it requires us to search for it primarily at the source. If you want chocolate, go to Hershey, PA. If you want peace, go to the God of peace.

7. Trust God to provide the grace needed in difficult situations (James 4:6). Trusting is not simply a spiritual version of wishful thinking. Putting our trust in God involves actively submitting ourselves to his goals and his ways of doing things. "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:7, 10).

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Isaiah's prophecy of animals living in peace with their natural enemies is both a prediction about God's eternal kingdom and a statement of his intent for the church today.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. List both animal and human examples of "natural" enemies or antagonists.

2. Analyze the means by which Christ brings his peace into human relationships.

3. Discuss practical steps to take in bringing Christ's peace into a broken relationship.

Before the Lesson

On a strip of shelf paper, write this heading: "Opposites that do not attract." Mount this across the front of the room.

Provide at least one index card per person. On each of three cards, write, "Republicans," "Lion," and the name of a local athletic team. On each of three other cards, write, "Democrats," "Lamb," and the chief rival of the local athletic team.

Mount these cards, three each on opposite ends of the shelf paper.

Have ready a large bowl or other container in which people can put completed cards.

Into the Lesson

As the first people arrive, give them each two index cards. Ask

them to write on one card the name of an individual or a group of people or animals. On the other card, they are to write the name of a rival or enemy person or group of people or animals. Refer to the sample cards mounted at the front of the room. When people complete a pair of cards, they place them in the container you have provided.

When it is time to begin and you have at least one completed card for each person present, randomly distribute the cards among the class, one card per person. Instruct everyone to stand and try to find the person who has the card for the "antagonist" on his or her card. "For example, if your card says 'Roadrunner,' for whom would you be looking?" (Coyote).

As people find their rivals, one person from each pair should stand along the wall at the left side of the room and the other person at the right side of the room.

When everyone has found an enemy, ask for a pair to volunteer to step forward and identify themselves.

Invite group members to suggest factors that made enemies out of these people or animals. Then ask, "What would it take to make peace between these two?" Invite several suggestions, then repeat with a few other sets of rivals, seeking to get at least one example each of an animal rivalry, an individual struggle, and a group conflict.

Make a transition into the lesson with a statement like this: "Today

we are going to look Isaiah's prophecy of animals' living in peace with their natural enemies. This prophecy is both a prediction of God's eternal kingdom and of his intent for the church."

Into the Word

Ask for ten volunteers with Bibles to read aloud one line of Isaiah 11:6-9. Take a moment to get your readers organized, either having them come to the front or stand at their seats. Explain that the first person will read until he or she comes to a punctuation mark—a comma, period, colon or semicolon. Then each other reader will continue similarly, reading to the next punctuation mark. It should not matter whether all readers have the same translation. While wording varies among different versions, the punctuation for this poetic message is almost identical in all major English Bibles. If all goes well, the tenth reader will conclude with the first half of verse 9. This leaves you to read—with extra emphasis—the second half of the verse, which gives the explanation for this amazing phenomenon. After you finish reading, ask, "What do you see in this passage as the cause for these drastic transformations of animal nature?" ("The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.")

Point out that knowledge of the Lord is equally powerful in transforming human conflicts into peaceful relationships. Lead the class in analyzing the process by which Christ brings his peace into

human relationships. To do this, present each of the seven points in the "Comments on the Text" section. Depending on the time available, select one or more of the Scriptures listed under each point to have volunteers look up and read aloud. After each Scripture is read, ask, "How does knowing what this verse says help in moving closer to the scene portrayed by Isaiah?" "What difference would these verses make in defeating the natural tendency towards conflict?"

Into Life

Divide the class into groups of four. Ask each group to identify a common area of interpersonal conflict, one that causes stress and leads to broken relationships—family, work related, within the church, or another. If people feel comfortable, they may suggest an actual conflict situation from their own lives.

Once a group has selected a problem, the members are to discuss practical steps they could take in bringing Christ's peace into that situation. Encourage people to consider the Scriptures that were read earlier in identifying helpful actions.

After about five minutes of group interaction, invite a representative from each group to state the problem the group considered and one or two actions they feel would be helpful.

Close the session with a time of prayer, asking that God's peace will flourish in each person's heart and relationships.

On Wings of Eagles

Deuteronomy 32:11

Comments on the Text

The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) was recited by him "from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel" (Deuteronomy 31:30). Nearing the end of his life, after guiding Israel for forty years, Moses climaxed his last great message with this remarkable song of warning and encouragement. To help his huge audience visualize the important points he was making, from the very beginning of the song, Moses used a remarkable range of pictorial descriptions: "Listen O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants" (32:1,2).

Since his audience had spent forty years in the vast barrenness of the Sinai wilderness and were presently gathered near the desolate plains of the Dead Sea, Moses' opening words were guaranteed to capture their attention.

As he continued his song, the thoughts and emotions of his listeners were struck again and again with his vivid imagery:

- "He is the Rock" (v. 4).
- "In a desert land he found him [Jacob, God's people]" (v. 10).
- "In a barren and howling waste" (v. 10).
- "He guarded him as the apple of his eye" (v. 10).
- "He nourished him with honey from the rock, and with oil from the flinty crag" (v. 13).
- "You drank the foaming blood of the grape" (v. 14).
- "For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below" (v. 22).
- "I will . . . spend my arrows against them" (vs. 23, 24).
- "When I sharpen my flashing sword . . . I will take vengeance" (v. 41)

At the conclusion of this song, knowing full well that these people would shortly advance into the land God had promised them, Moses emphasized the importance of the warnings and encouragements he had just given. "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.

By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (vs. 46, 47).

Moses knew that his leadership of these people was about to end. On the very same day, the Lord led Moses to climb Mount Nebo. From its peak he saw the land that his people would conquer—and the place where he would soon be buried. Of all the messages Moses delivered, this song powerfully drew together all his deepest hopes and fears for the future of the people he loved. On that basis alone, the song deserves our attention.

It is in the midst of this colorful, passionate poem that Moses makes his famous reference to an eagle teaching its young to fly. Having praised "the greatness of our God" (v. 3), having berated the people because they "acted corruptly toward him" (v. 5), Moses urgently wanted the people to remember God's deep love and compassion for his people. Thus, he described the woefully bleak circumstances in which God found them.

A "desert land," a "barren and howling waste" certainly described the territory in which the nation had been wandering for the past forty years. There had obviously been times when the people had felt abandoned by God. Yet all through Israel's years in the wilderness, "he shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye" (v. 10).

NOTE: The expression, "apple of his eye" is used three other times in Scripture (Psalm 17:8; Proverbs 7:2;

Zechariah 2:8) and refers to the pupil, the central part of the eye, which controls vision and thus is highly valued and must be protected.

Now that Israel was on the threshold of entering the Promised Land, Moses did not want the people to assume that all their troubles were behind them. The "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8), to which they had looked forward all their lives, was not a utopia where they would be free of trouble. Moses remembered that their parents had complained so bitterly, even after their miraculous escape from slavery, each time they ran into difficulties (Exodus 14:10-12; 15:22-24; 16:1-3; 17:1, 2, etc.). What would this generation be likely to do after arriving at the culmination of their dreams and finding life was not perfect?

Thus, Moses reminded them of a scene they had all doubtless witnessed during their years in the mountainous deserts. An eagle, making its nest uncomfortable for the young birds, hovering without helping as the eaglet begs for food, catching the fluttering youngster on its outspread wings. Moses was telling Israel, "Don't expect the promised land to be the lap of luxury. God has not brought you here to be comfortable and well fed. He has brought you here so that you may grow to maturity as his people, able to overcome the hard times life will always bring. Remember this, and 'you will live long in the land.'"

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

Moses compared the way an eagle teaches its young to fly with the way God equips his people to deal with the struggles of life.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Study Moses' description of an eagle teaching its young to fly.
2. Read Scriptures that describe God's use of problems to bring good results in people's lives.
3. Share incidents in which God has used difficult circumstances to help bring believers to maturity.

Before the Lesson

Have ready a portable tape player with a microphone and a blank cassette. On the chalkboard, overhead transparency, or a poster, write this instruction: "Question of the Day: When have you ever said or thought, 'Things are bound to get better when . . . ?'"

Locate the following sections in Chapter 12 of *When Life Is a Zoo* so you can easily refer people to them during the session. Prepare two transparencies or posters showing the page numbers where people will find the sections to read:

In *When Life Is a Zoo*, read the paragraphs that describe:

1. The mother eagle stirs up the nest.
2. The mother eagle hovers over its young.
3. The mother eagle carrying her young.

In *When Life Is a Zoo*, read the stories of:

- Connie Wurtenberger (a young mother with cancer)
- Fanny Crosby (blind hymn writer)
- Dave Reavor (Vietnam veteran)
- Dave Ring (father with cerebral palsy)
- John Claypool (father of leukemia victim)

It would be wise to have some copies of the book available for those who do not bring one with them to class.

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, call their attention to the "Question of the Day" and encourage them to ask at least three other people to tell them their answer to the question. As people talk, listen for stories that seem particularly interesting (i.e., humorous, poignant, uplifting, etc.). Record those people's remembrances of a time when they looked forward to something happening to improve a particular situation.

After recording a variety of responses, invite everyone to be seated. Play back the stories you recorded. Then ask for a show of hands of those who told a story of a time when things really did get better when the anticipated event occurred. Ask for a show of hands of those whose situation actually got worse. Also ask, "How many of you found that solving one set of problems just introduced a new set of problems you had to face?"

Make the transition into this lesson by commenting: "Most people tend to feel that a good life is one that is as trouble free as possible. When problems loom, we count on God to help us avoid them or to get us out of them. Many people frankly feel that if God isn't busily engaged in removing trouble from their paths, what's the point in believing in God at all? Today we are going to see that God has a totally different perspective on the role of trouble in our lives, a perspective that is frequently presented throughout the Bible. God's perspective on trouble is most vividly described by a brief glimpse into the animal kingdom. Moses vividly compared the way in which an eagle teaches its young to fly with the way God equips his people to deal with the struggles of life."

Into the Word

Use the material in the "Comments on the Text" to present a brief lecture, explaining the background of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Emphasize Moses' desire to prepare the people for the realities of life in the Promised Land, not wanting them to create false hopes that life in Canaan would be idyllic and trouble free.

Read aloud Deuteronomy 32:9, 10, explaining that it was a striking description of the wilderness in which Moses' audience had wandered for the past forty years. It was vital that the people did not forget God's faithfulness in caring

for them throughout every difficulty they had to face in the desert.

Read aloud Deuteronomy 32:11, Moses' description of an eagle teaching its young to fly. Divide the class into three sections. Within each section, have people form groups of no more than six. Make sure there is at least one copy of *When Life Is a Zoo* in every small group. Show the transparency or poster on which you have written the three study assignments about the eagle. Assign the groups in each section one of the three assignments, reading the appropriate paragraphs in *When Life Is a Zoo*. Instruct the groups to discover the implication for us of the description of the eagle that they have been assigned.

After several minutes, invite volunteers from each section to share their findings.

Move among the small groups and assign each group one of the following Scriptures, which describe God's purpose for allowing problems to enter our lives:

Matthew 5:43-48

John 15:18-20

John 16:31-33

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

1 Corinthians 10:11-13

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Philippians 1:12-14

1 Thessalonians 3:2-5,13

James 1:2-5

1 Peter 4:12-16

Revelation 2:8-11

NOTE: It is not necessary that all passages be assigned, as they all reinforce the same basic points. All of

these passages are referenced in *When Life Is a Zoo*.

Instruct the groups to read their passages and to prepare one-sentence statements of God's purpose in allowing problems to enter our lives.

After groups have had time to read and discuss, ask for volunteers to read aloud their groups' statements.

Into Life

Direct the small groups to take a few minutes to allow each person to tell of a problem situation that God used to help him or her grow in some way. Allow three or four minutes for group interaction.

Invite volunteers to share with the class an incident they have observed in which God has used difficult circumstances to help build maturity.

After several people have shared, select five people who have

good oral reading skills to each read aloud from *When Life Is a Zoo* one of the stories of Christians overcoming problems. Show the transparency or poster on which you have listed the stories to be read.

Conclude the session by reading aloud two brief Bible passages:

First, read the promise in Isaiah 40:31: "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Then, for your closing prayer, read the prayer in Psalm 17:6-8: "I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you . . . Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings."

The Value of Work

Proverbs 6:6-11

Comments on the Text

As common as ants are in daily life, they only appear in the pages of Scripture twice, both times in the book of Proverbs. While ants are generally regarded as nuisances, both biblical references commend the ant. The ant is admired by Solomon, not for its beauty, its brains, or its brawn, but for its industrious foresight. Ants are credited with being wise because "they store up their food in the summer" (Proverbs 30:25).

Somehow, Solomon's references to this little creature are the most memorable passages in Scripture on the subject of work. The prominent status of these verses is not because the topic is rarely mentioned in the Bible. Just the opposite is true. The various forms of the word *work* appear more than 400 times throughout Scripture. And that does not count the hundreds of places with similar words (e.g., *toil*, *labor*, *service*) were used instead.

Work literally permeates the Bible. We meet it in the creation narrative as God himself is described as engaging in work: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all

his work" (Genesis 2:2). Immediately after creating the first man, God "put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15).

Continue all the way to the final chapter of Revelation, and we discover that those who dwell in the New Jerusalem will work: "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:3).

Perhaps the idea of serving in the very presence of God seems to bear no resemblance to serving an unappreciative boss, toiling in a dead-end job, or working the fingers to the bone. Writing in Ecclesiastes, Solomon laments about his work, the great achievements of his life:

"For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 2:21-23).

However, the Christian can discover, along with Brother Lawrence in the Middle Ages, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, even in the midst of tasks that appear to be tedious drudgery or tension inducing pressure cookers. Scripture is full of examples and insights for working "with wisdom, knowledge and skill" and gaining significant personal benefits.

When Life Is a Zoo identifies several great benefits that are gained from our labor:

1. We are partners with God in providing for the needs of the world. A job is not just a means of securing a paycheck; it is involvement in developing or maintaining something of value to the community.

Proverbs 10:4 compares the poverty that results from laziness with the financial gain that comes to the diligent worker. Numerous other proverbs echo the same idea. See also 12:11, 27; 14:23; 28:19.

Proverbs 24:30-34 is a memorable description of the field of the sluggard, the lazy person who has foolishly allowed his vineyard to deteriorate to the point that it produces no sustenance. The result of such laziness is that "poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man."

Proverbs 31:15-21 is part of another well-known passage. In sharp contrast to the fate of the sluggard, we are shown the enterprising woman whose work enables her to care for her family and be able to be generous in assisting others who are in need. This latter

point is vital, since the accumulation of wealth is never seen in Scripture to be a valid end in itself, but always a means to enable a person to contribute to the well-being of society.

First Corinthians 9:13, 14 is Paul's comparison of the Old Testament pattern of supporting the priests for their work in the temple, and the New Testament plan to support those who preach the gospel. We see here the principle that those who engage in spiritual work, thus not producing a tangible economic product or service, should "receive their living from the gospel." Underlying that principle is the responsibility of those who work in secular pursuits to set aside a portion of their income to give to "those who serve at the altar."

Ephesians 4:28 is directed at Christians who formerly made their living dishonestly. Not only are they instructed to find gainful employment, but to do so in order to "have something to share with those in need."

Second Thessalonians 3:7-13 is Paul's description of his labors when he was Thessalonica. Using his own example, he states a basic rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." As is consistently taught throughout Scripture, Paul upholds work as the means by which a person receives life's necessities. Paul's language reflects the seriousness of this issue: "Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat."

2. God uses our work to develop character and self-esteem. We become better people, and gain greater satisfaction in life through the process of doing necessary jobs to the best of our abilities.

Deuteronomy 16:13-15 contains instructions about observing the Feast of Tabernacles, a week of celebration after the harvest has been completed. Once the hard work was done, the people were told to "Be joyful at your Feast. . . . For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete." This annual event was not just a respite from work, a break from the routine. We see here the principle that a job well done brings deep personal satisfaction.

Second Chronicles 32:1-8 tells of King Hezekiah's preparations to defend Jerusalem against an invasion of the Assyrian army. We see an interesting combination of activity here, hard work in preparing defenses is done along with exhortations to trust the Lord. The result of the work and the words was that "the people gained confidence." The Bible never gives a reason to expect God to intervene in any situation if we have not worked diligently to do all that we can. Instead, we see repeatedly that our best efforts combined with trust in God produces a positive result, a reason for facing life with confidence.

Proverbs 13:4 is another proverb contrasting the diligent worker with the sluggard. In this case, we

see that work produces more than just material gains, for "the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied." Honest work brings a sense of fulfillment that is vital to a person's emotional health.

Proverbs 22:29 describes what happens to a skillful worker. Work that is well done earns status and recognition, obviously enhancing a person's sense of worth.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 begins with the question, "What does the worker gain from his toil?" The answer comes in verse 13: "That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God." Here we see the two-fold benefit of work: our needs are met ("food and drink") and we develop character and self-esteem ("satisfaction"). And these benefits are "the gift of God."

Esther 10:3 gives us a quick summary of the career of an Old Testament hero: Mordecai, the Jew who held a high position in the court of Xerxes, king of Persia. We are told that Mordecai "worked for the good of his people." As a result, he was "held in high esteem." There are those who work hard to fulfill their personal ambitions. But the benefits God promises are for those who work for a higher goal.

Paul addresses this issue of the motivation for our work in Colossians 3:23, 24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Lesson Plans

Central Truth

The book of Proverbs uses ants to teach a positive lesson about the value of diligent, purposeful work.

Learning Goals

As a result of participation in this lesson, each student will. . . .

1. Design a banner illustrating the lesson of the ant.
2. Identify God's intended benefits from the work he or she is doing.
3. Commit to specific actions that will improve his or her approach to work.

Before the Lesson

On the chalkboard, an overhead transparency or large sheet of paper mounted at the front of the room, write these two headings:

- "One thing I like about my work:"
- "One thing I dislike about my work:"

Provide chalk or pens for people to use.

Secure one large sheet of paper and several colored markers for each group of four to six people.

On a transparency or poster, write Ecclesiastes 3:9: "What does the worker gain from his toil?"

Into the Lesson

As people arrive, invite each of them to write one thing he or she likes or dislikes about his or her job. Encourage people to mingle, sharing "war stories" from their places of employment.

When it is officially time to begin, read aloud each of the following quotations about work, asking people to raise their hands if the statement seems to describe their job situation:

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy—and Jill a rich widow."

"Work is the refuge of people who have nothing better to do" (Oscar Wilde).

"Nothing is really work unless you would rather be doing something else" (Sir James Barrie).

"If a man love the labor of any trade . . . the gods have called him" (Robert Louis Stevenson).

"A man is a worker. If he is not that, he is nothing" (Joseph Conrad).

"If you don't want to work, you have to work to earn enough money so that you won't have to work" (Ogden Nash).

"Without work, all life goes rotten" (Albert Camus).

"Folks who never do any more than they get paid for, never get paid for any more than they do" (Elbert Hubbard).

"When people are serving, life is no longer meaningless" (John Gardner).

Make the transition into the session with this comment: "Today we are going to explore a famous proverb that refers to ants to teach a positive lesson about the value of diligent, purposeful work."

Into the Word

Read aloud Proverbs 6:6-11. Invite volunteers to share their initial reactions to what this passage says about work. If necessary, use information in *When Life Is a Zoo* and "Comments on the Text" to clarify people's comments.

Divide the class into groups of four to six people. Give each group a large sheet of paper and several markers. Instruct them to work together to design a banner that illustrates the lesson of the ant and the sluggard. Allow five to seven minutes for groups to work. As banners are completed, have groups use masking tape or tacks to mount them on the walls.

Ask, "Having thought a little more about the lesson of the ant and the sluggard, in what ways have your reactions or thoughts changed?" Accept comments from several people.

Assign each small group one or more of the following Scriptures to locate and read in order to identify God's intended benefits from engaging in work:

Provide for Needs

Proverbs 10:4

Proverbs 14:23

Proverbs 31:15-21

1 Corinthians 9:13, 14

Ephesians 4:28

2 Thessalonians 3:7-13

Develop Character and Self-Esteem

Deuteronomy 16:13-15

2 Chronicles 32:1-8

Proverbs 13:4

Proverbs 22:29

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

Esther 10:3

Allow several minutes for groups to read and talk about their assigned verses. Then invite volunteers to share their groups' insights about the benefits of diligent work. If necessary, expand or clarify on their comments, using information from the "Comments on the Text" section of this lesson.

Into Life

Lead the group in suggesting various difficult work situations with which people must cope. For example:

- An unpleasant or unfair boss;
- Tedious, boring tasks;
- High pressure to maintain or improve performance;
- Encouragement to "cut corners";
- Hindrances to fulfilling family obligations.

List people's ideas on the chalkboard.

Instruct each small group to focus on one or two problem areas, discussing specific actions people can take that will improve their approach to work by dealing positively with that problem.

After four or five minutes of interaction, ask for volunteers from each group to share their best ideas for improving a difficult work situation.

Summarize the discussion by reading aloud Colossians 3:23, 24, Paul's exhortation to do all work as for the Lord, not for a person. Then close the session in prayer.



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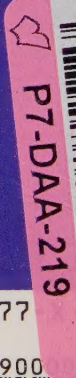
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