

WHO IS JESUS? // FORGIVENESS // ANGER MANAGEMENT

connect

LEADER GUIDE

SPRING 2021

IMMERSE IN HIS WORD

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SPRING 2021

LEADER GUIDE

YEAR 1 • QUARTER 3

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Find out more about **connect** and other tips and tools at www.21stcc.com/immerse-connect

*2 BONUS LESSONS

Get downloadable lessons about about Jesus' death and resurrection. Go to <http://Lesson-DL.com> and enter this

Access Code:
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Year 1, Quarter 3

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Digital Resources

Enhance your connection to your students with:

- » video resources for each lesson
- » 12 customizable *Leader Guide* lesson outlines
- » 12 reproducible student group discussion cards
- » PowerPoint visuals for each lesson
- » memory verse visuals for each lesson
- » weekly parent and student connection materials

21ST CENTURY CHRISTIAN

DEAR LEADER,

What do you consider the first signs of spring in your area? Is it the first robin you see? Maybe the first baby animals being born? Or do you look for other signs such as frozen earth thawing out and snow melting? Or perhaps it's the mood of students, already counting the days to spring break, and then on to the end of the school year.

Or maybe you see preparations, as some who follow Christ (and even those who don't know Him yet) get ready to celebrate the season in which many remember and honor the sacrifice Jesus made for us, and rejoice in His victory over death.

When we created CONNECT, we knew it would be important to cover the foundations of the Christian faith—simple yet many-layered stories and messages that educate us about key principles, such as the mystery of the triune God, the truth of God's Word, the love of Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We realized, like you probably have, that not every teen who walks through your door has heard these Scriptures that are so familiar to most of us. And even those teens who have grown up in the church may never have dug into these stories in a way that grabs hold of them and transforms their hearts.

In this quarter, you have that opportunity to dig into age-old lessons and guide your teens to meet Jesus in new ways. You have a chance to lead students out of shame and sorrow and bitterness, and into forgiveness and grace. You may even have the privilege of being trusted with a teen's full-blown anger and grief, and opening the door for them to find the peace that blows all our minds.

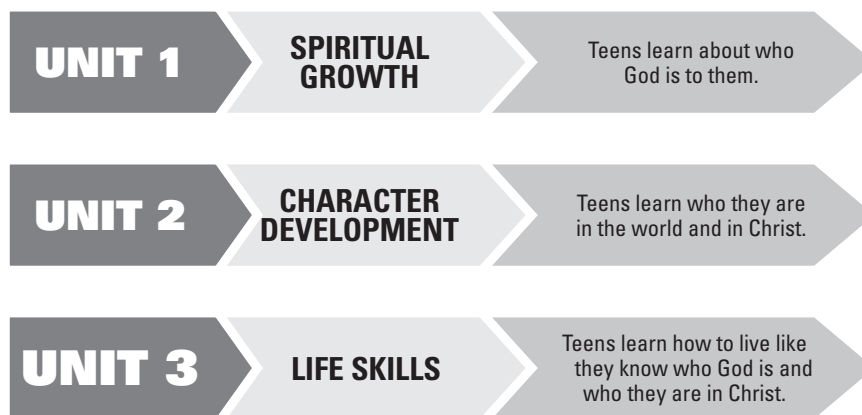
And we pray you rediscover grace and forgiveness and peace—and Jesus—all over again as you lead and teach, and as you pray and read.

As you work through this quarter, remember to take notes and let us know how we might make this curriculum more helpful for you. We'd love to hear from you. What do you need? What can we pray about for you? Let us know. Please hop on over to the website listed on the contents page to find out how to contact us.

How to Use This Guide

Let's take a look at the anatomy of this discussion-based curriculum. Three units make up each quarter, or module. One unit is focused on spiritual growth, one is focused on character development, and one is focused on practical skills for life. But to be clear—solid Bible study, Christian principles, and practical life application are built into every lesson.

Each unit is made up of four sessions in which essential principles are wrestled with and discussed through a biblical worldview. There are twelve lessons in each quarter. We also provide two special lessons for winter and two for spring quarters*—these are digital lessons that are provided in *Digital Resources* and can be used at the times that work best for your ministry.



LESSON SECTIONS

Each lesson has a certain structure, which you can use as-is or customize for your needs. Please note that suggested **leader remarks** to the students have been provided in **bold** throughout the guide for you to use or adapt as you wish.



On the lesson header page, you'll find the unit focus (Ex: Spiritual Growth), unit title, lesson title, and lesson Scripture focus. You'll also immediately see the Connection point—the main message of the lesson.

In the margins you'll see information such as the supplies list and leader tips. Leader tips are provided throughout the sections of the lesson.

REMEMBER: Challenge your students to memorize a verse each week. A graphic of this verse (or verses) is also included in *Digital Resources* and a memorization exercise is provided in their *Student Guides*.

PREP: Think over the concepts presented in the lesson. Pray about your approach to the material and ask God to help you make solid connections with your students.

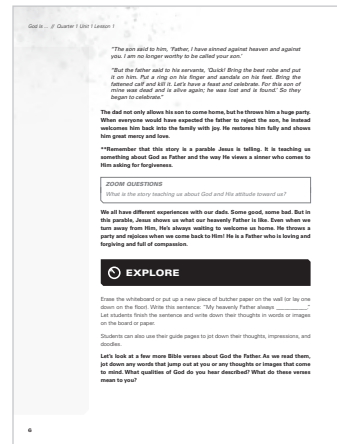
LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES: Look here for a summary of helpful Bible background notes or issues to look out for as you teach the lesson. Also notice the overview of the lesson, which reminds you of the overall framework.

PREVIEW: This is an activity or conversation starter that gives a glimpse of the main idea of the lesson. You also have the option of using a lesson intro video (provided in *Digital Resources*) as an attention-getter or discussion-starter to get the group thinking and talking.



CONNECT: This is the main teaching section of the lesson—when you'll lead students through a study of portions of the Bible. There's also an option to “flip the classroom” and let students lead their own small groups through part of the Bible study (take note of the Leader Tip and marked paragraphs that guide you to invite students to lead discussion). Notice also the ZOOM QUESTIONS in this part of the lesson. These are questions designed to take the discussion a little deeper for those students who are ready to do so.

EXPLORE: In this section, give students a chance to interact with what they've learned or to express their thoughts. If you include worship as part of your youth teaching time, this is an excellent spot to add songs or prayers or time for reflection. Students may be invited to use their *Student Guides* to jot down thoughts and images that help them to process what they are learning.



ACT: Leave students with a few ideas of ways they can apply this lesson to their own circumstances or practice what they've learned throughout the week. Here they might be invited to take on a prayer challenge, talk to someone about God, ask a parent a question, search more in the Bible, or perform other actions. You'll also see that every lesson ends with a brief prayer you can pray over your students and some reminders for ways you can connect with your students or their families.

For lesson information from more quarters, check out the scope and sequence provided on the curriculum website as shown on the Contents page.

FURTHER RESOURCES

You'll discover three articles in this guide that offer information and ideas that will be relevant to the corresponding unit material. These articles will provide some more context to a wide variety of issues, such as helping at-risk teens, recognizing authority in the church, and coping with verbal abuse.

We also offer the accompanying *Digital Resources*, which include

- video resources for each lesson
- customizable *Leader Guide* lesson outlines
- reproducible student group discussion cards
- PowerPoint visuals for each lesson
- memory verse visuals for each lesson
- weekly parent and student connection materials

We encourage you to find out more about this curriculum and other tips and tools at the website listed on the Contents page.

And remember! We value you and your insights. Please contact us and let us know how we can serve you. Our goal is to help you help more teens come to know God better every week.

Teens are under an enormous amount of stress these days. They are feeling pressure from more and more directions, and we know you are too. You are making a difference in their young lives, and we would love to pray for you and partner with you as God brings about transformation through your ministry.

***PLEASE NOTE:** If you use this curriculum as a year-round option and use the free, downloadable lessons provided for winter (about Jesus' birth) and spring (about Jesus' death and resurrection), those two quarters will have more sessions in them than the others (see sample plan below).

Quarter/Season	Number of Printed Lessons/Weeks	Number of Digital Lessons/Weeks	Sample Plan Notes
1/Fall	12	0	order Q2 early
2/Winter	12	2	insert 2 digital lessons as needed
3/Spring	12	2	insert 2 digital lessons as needed
4/Summer	12	0	order Q5 early
Totals	48	4	= 52 weeks

This structure may be new to those who are more familiar with thirteen-lesson quarters. Please keep this in mind as you plan your programming calendars and your ordering schedule. For information on accessing the free downloadable lessons for this quarter, **please check out the Contents page or the Unit 1 header page.**

Unit 1 // Spiritual Growth

Who Is Jesus?

Summary

Jesus may well be the most recognizable figure in the world. He is known by some Jews as the Rabbi and by other Jews as the Messiah, by the Muslims (and others) as a great prophet, and by Christians as their Lord and Savior. And yet, not one of us really knows what He looked like or sounded like, or what it was like to walk with Him on this earth. But we can get to know Him and come closer to Him as we think about our answer to Jesus' question: "Who do you say I am?"

LESSON 1: Our Messiah

LESSON 2: Our Friend

LESSON 3: Our King

LESSON 4: Our Answer

Unit Video

You'll find an introduction to some of the questions and themes we will be discussing in the Q3U1 Intro video, available in *Digital Resources*. You may want to use this in various ways:

- Show it to your leaders and have an in-person, online, or text discussion about the themes before you begin the unit.
- Send it to parents to introduce them to the unit material.
- Show it during the first lesson of the unit to introduce your students to the concepts.

Unit Resources

- "How Do Teens Relate to Jesus?" p. 42
- Events of Jesus' Life, inside back cover
- Salvation Path in *Digital Resources*
- Special Needs Solutions in *Digital Resources*
- What to Do If You See Abuse in *Digital Resources*

REMINDER

Two free downloadable digital lessons about Jesus' death and resurrection are available. Just go to <http://Lesson-DL.com> and enter this **Access Code: 901362796**. Download the two lessons (with their accompanying materials) and use them as needed. For example, you may want to insert them before the end of Unit 1 or right after Unit 1, or you may not want to use them at all. The choice is yours!

Spiritual Growth

Who Is Jesus?

Our Messiah

Quarter 3 Unit 1 Lesson 1

Isaiah 9:1, 2, 6, 7; Matthew 4:12-17

CONNECTION

**Jesus is our Messiah
who fulfills God's promises.**



REMEMBER

*"And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Isaiah 9:6b



PREP

The Bible is full of God's promises, encouragement, and reassurance. God promised never to leave us or forsake us. God is for us and not against us. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In all things God is working for the good of those who love Him. He offers supernatural peace, forgiveness, guidance, comfort, strength, and wisdom.

Take some time to think about your students before you lead this session. What do they face? What are they going through? What do they need? Our deepest need is for a relationship with the one true God. This unit is focused on Jesus, and each lesson will illuminate an important aspect of His nature and character. Ultimately, Jesus is our answer. But God cares more for your students than any of us can imagine. He cares about the specifics of what they face. Take some time to think about them and to lift up their needs and concerns in

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens or pencils

(optional: whiteboard or chart paper, dry-erase markers, sticky notes or index cards)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

prayer—those you are aware of and those you aren't. Pray that through this lesson, the Holy Spirit opens each of their hearts and minds to believe and receive this truth: Jesus is the Messiah, and He fulfills God's promises.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

Messiah means “anointed” or “the anointed one.” In ancient Israel, kings, prophets, and priests were set apart for service through a ceremony in which they were anointed with oil. Later, in the days of Jesus, when Greek was the common language, the equivalent term was *Christ* (John 1:41). People today sometimes mistakenly think that *Christ* is Jesus' last name. No, it's His title! That's why it's sometimes written in reverse order, as *Christ Jesus*, and why people sometimes say *Jesus the Christ*. Jesus Christ means Jesus “the anointed one.”

There are numerous prophecies in Scripture about the coming Messiah. It's difficult for us to imagine what faith in God was like before Jesus came on the scene, because His words and example have given us tremendous clarity about how to understand and interpret the Old Testament Scriptures. In this lesson, we're going to attempt to do it. We're going to travel back in time, thousands of years, to hear the words of the prophet Isaiah and the promises he delivered regarding the Messiah. Then we'll fast-forward to the corresponding moment in Jesus' life in which we learn that He is the fulfillment of those promises. There are numerous other passages in Scripture like this. The Old Testament prophets predicted the place of Jesus' birth, details about His life and ministry, and specifics about how He would die to set us free. Jesus is the Messiah, who fulfills God's promises.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

PREVIEW

Use the U1L1 video as students arrive to spark discussion or attract attention. Greet students and make them feel welcome.

LEADER TIP

Remember that all students may not be familiar with the events of Jesus' life. Point teens to the helpful Events of Jesus' Life tool in the back of the *Leader and Student Guides* to give students a quick visual overview.

The “chosen one” is a common trope in fiction. Novels, movies, and video games often feature a character who is set apart or who has special powers. Sometimes they have superpowers or abilities. They might have a special destiny to defeat some evil, carry some responsibility, or save the world. They often have an unusual identity or story of origin—born into royalty, from another planet, child of a god, or something like that.

A lot of times, this character doesn’t initially know about any special status as the “chosen one.” A mentor or some bizarre set of circumstances reveals the character’s true nature.

Think of one of these “chosen one” fictional characters, and list three facts about them, without revealing their name.

Give students a few minutes to think of a fictional character and come up with some identifying facts about them. (Optionally, give students an index card or sticky note to jot down their answers.) Let students take turns sharing the facts about the character they chose and invite the rest of the group to guess who it is.

What do these “chosen one” characters have in common?

Why do people like stories about them?

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

LEADER TIP

Prime the pump with these first discussion questions. Ask the questions and give students a minute to think. Then invite them to share their thoughts with one or two others, before you discuss as a group. This will greatly increase participation!



CONNECT

Imagine for a moment that we could travel back in time. A few hundred years ago, the United States didn’t exist. A thousand years ago, the English language didn’t exist in any form we would recognize today. Two thousand years ago, Jesus was walking on the earth. But we’re going even further back—to hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

What do you think people believed about God before Jesus entered the world?

People today have all kinds of different ideas about God. What are some of the things people believe about God today?

The year is approximately 700 BC. Most people live very simple lives: working with their hands, farming a small plot of land and tending their animals, seldom traveling more than a few miles from the place where they were born. There are no cars, no smartphones, no computers, no Internet, no electric lights. The nights are very dark. And there is spiritual darkness too. Jesus won’t be born for hundreds of years.

Enter Isaiah, a prophet whose name means “The Lord is salvation,” a man empowered by God to describe the future. Don’t worry about the lands of Zebulun (ZEB-you-lun) and Naphtali (NAF-tuh-lie). We’ll come back to them later. First, let’s read Isaiah 9:1, 2:

In the past [the Lord] humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

When Isaiah spoke these words, there was so much about God that had yet to be revealed. Much of the Bible hadn’t been written yet. The people had the Law, some of the Prophets, and many of the Psalms—valuable insights into what God cares about and what He had planned. But they had very little compared to what there was yet to know.

In the days before Jesus, people struggled to know where they stood with God. They tried to follow the rules. When they messed up, they made the appropriate sacrifices. But then they messed up again, as we all do, and likely felt that they hadn’t done enough. They must have always felt a little insecure, never completely free from guilt and regret.

Is God far away? Is He close? Is He angry? Is He indifferent?

Read what God promised through the prophet Isaiah in verses 6 and 7:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David’s throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

What promises does this passage make about the Messiah? Work together to make a list. Write them on a whiteboard or chart paper. Or, encourage students to make notes in their *Student Guides*.

What’s the longest you’ve ever had to wait for something? How did it feel when it finally happened? Or are you still waiting?

LEADERTIP

The question about broken promises could raise sensitive or painful memories. Be attentive and empathetic, but don't pry.

Don't give specifics, but has anyone ever broken a promise to you? What effect did that have on your relationship?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Think about people today who say they don't believe in God or aren't sure about God. Do you think most of them 1) Don't believe there is a God, 2) Don't think there's any way of knowing what He's like, or 3) Don't think He cares? Why?

Fast-forward 700 years from the time of Isaiah. Two cries pierce the night near the town of Bethlehem, the city of David. The first comes from a young Jewish woman named Mary, who was in the last pains of labor before giving birth, and the second comes from her baby as He drew His first breath. A powerful angel appeared in dazzling splendor and announced the birth of the Messiah to some shepherds who were watching over their flocks in the nearby countryside.

Mary and her husband, Joseph, gave the baby a special name, following the instructions both of them had received from an angel. They called Him Jesus, which means "the Lord saves," or "Savior." Later, men from distant lands followed signs in the stars and journeyed many miles to pay homage to the newborn king and to present Him with costly gifts worthy of a king.

*Ask four volunteers to find each of these brief Bible passages (listed down below and on the next page) and be prepared to read them out loud.

As Jesus grew older, He grew "in favor with God and man," until the time came for Him to leave home and begin His public ministry. He revealed Himself to be the Messiah that the Lord had promised through Isaiah. Let's look again at the four titles of Jesus foretold in Isaiah 9:6:

Wonderful Counselor: Matthew 7:28, 29

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Mighty God: Matthew 8:24-27

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

LEADERTIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide View* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (**) after the small group time concludes.

Everlasting Father: John 14:8, 9

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

Prince of Peace: Luke 2:8-14

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

In what ways was Jesus unique? What are some of the other things Jesus said and did that set Him apart from everyone else? (He miraculously healed people and even raised some from the dead. He claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God. He foretold that He would be crucified and then be raised from the dead.)

What kinds of reactions did people have toward Jesus? (Amazement, awe, respect. But the Jewish religious leaders reacted with jealousy and anger—even to the point of calling for Jesus’ execution.)

LEADER TIP

Consider asking a spokesperson from each student-led group to share some of the highlights from what they discussed.

ZOOM QUESTIONS

People in Jesus’ day expected the Messiah to come in power to establish an earthly kingdom. In what ways do you think Jesus fit the description of the Messiah that people expected? In what ways was He different from what people expected? How does Jesus compare to what people today perceive Him to be?

****The Gospel of Matthew makes it clear that Jesus was the Messiah predicted in Isaiah 9.**

Ask a student to read Matthew 4:12-17:

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

*“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.”*

*From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent,
for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

Zebulun and Naphtali were two of Jacob’s twelve sons, great-grandsons of Abraham. Those twelve sons became the twelve tribes, or family branches, of Israel. Eventually those twelve tribes were given portions of territory in the Promised Land. As the Lord led Isaiah to predict in Isaiah 9:1, Jesus would honor the area of these two tribes, near the Sea of Galilee and home to many Gentiles, by spending much time there during His ministry. A major trade route, called the Way of the Sea, also went through the area. Though these people lived in spiritual darkness, the great light of Jesus was about to dawn on them!

This unit is all about Jesus. Jesus is our Messiah. He is our closest friend. He is our King. He is the answer. We’re going to come to God, and come to the Scripture, through Jesus. All Scripture points to Him, and understanding Jesus is the key to understanding the Bible.

God promised to shine a light into our dark world. Jesus, our Messiah, fulfills God’s promises. Understanding that Jesus is the Messiah changes things.

How might it change the way you see God?

How might it change the way you read the Bible?

How might it change the way you pray?

EXPLORE

Fast-forward 2,000 years to today. Here we are. Jesus has made some promises to you. The Bible is nearly bursting with promises and encouragement from God. Here’s a useful tip: When you read the Bible on your own, ask yourself, “Does God promise anything in this passage?” You’ll be surprised by how often that simple question helps you notice important truths.

Break the students up again into small groups, as needed, or instruct individual students to look up the Scriptures on their own or with a friend. Notice the list of references that follows, taken from some very encouraging passages of Scripture. Tell students to use one or as many of them as they like. Give them several minutes to look up verses and

LEADER TIP

These questions could provide a very natural lead-in for students to pray for one another.

digest them. Then invite students to read the verses they chose and explain in their own words what God has promised us there.

Promises from God: Joshua 1:9; Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 40:29-31; Matthew 7:7; Romans 8:28; 8:38, 39; Philippians 4:6, 7; 12, 13; 19; James 1:5; 4:7, 8; 1 Peter 1:3, 4; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 21:3, 4.

Which of these promises connects with you most right now? Which do you most need to hear?

In what way might Jesus be the fulfillment of that promise for you?

ACT

Both of the key passages in today’s lesson—the first from Isaiah 9 and the second from Matthew 4—mention the light that the Messiah would bring. Isaiah 9:2 says, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.” Matthew quoted the prophet Isaiah’s words just before Jesus began preaching, teaching, and healing people. So, these words from Isaiah 9 would be fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah and would set the focus for Jesus’ ministry.

As we talked about already, “darkness” in this verse could mean a couple different things: it could refer to the ignorance of the people—a lack of knowledge about who God is or what their purpose was. It can also refer to spiritual darkness, a time of giving over to desires that come from sinful hearts rather than the heart of God. And what do people do when they are caught up in either the darkness of ignorance or the darkness of sinfulness? They do what everyone does when we find ourselves stuck in a dark place—look for light. When in darkness, we reach out and try to grab hold of light—something that will give us information.

When the Israelites reached out, sometimes they found themselves caught up in worshipping idols, because tangible, god-like things seemed to be a more immediate way to find out some answers. And even though we can look back and see where they went wrong, that doesn’t mean we don’t find ourselves trapped in the same misguided thinking sometimes.

Although we were all born into a “land of deep darkness,” Jesus came to replace the darkness in our hearts and minds with “a great light!”

Turn to someone next to you and ask each other these questions:

When have you felt trapped in some kind of darkness?

What’s one part of your life where you wish you had more of Jesus’ light?

LEADERTIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May you receive Jesus' wonderful counsel, believe in Him as mighty God, experience His supernatural peace, and through Him, enjoy a deeper understanding of who the Father is. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* for help in guiding them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

Spiritual Growth

Who Is Jesus?

Our Friend

Quarter 3 Unit 1 Lesson 2

Hebrews 2:10-18; 4:14-16

CONNECTION

**Jesus is our friend
who understands us.**



REMEMBER

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

Hebrews 4:15



PREP

The focus of this lesson is on Jesus’ humanity. Because the Son of God, one of the members of the Trinity, became fully human in Jesus, He truly understands us. Jesus is our friend. This is a difficult concept for people to grasp. God can feel distant, indifferent, or continually angry. Many people live with a constant sense of God’s disapproval, or with crippling spiritual insecurity, as if God is watching us only to catch us doing something wrong. It can be difficult to believe God is truly for us, that He loves us and wants what’s best for us. Grasping Jesus’ humanity is key to sensing God’s closeness and compassion.

Take time to think about how Jesus has been a friend to you. What hard times has He gotten you through? Bring to mind a time in your life when you sensed Christ’s comfort, counsel, or protection. Was there a time when you had no one else to turn to, and Jesus was there for you?

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

(optional: whiteboard or chart paper, dry-erase markers)

LEADERTIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

LEADERTIP

Remember that all students may not be familiar with the events of Jesus’ life. Point teens to the helpful Events of Jesus’ Life tool in the back of the *Leader* and *Student Guides* to give students a quick visual overview.

Before you lead this lesson, take a few moments to speak frankly with Jesus, as your friend. Jesus is the Son of God, the King of kings. And He is also fully human. Jesus is your friend. Take a few moments to talk to Him and listen to Him. Be as honest and straightforward as you can be.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

Some complicated issues come up in the passages we'll look at today. First, we're delving into Jesus' dual nature. Ever since shortly after Jesus' lifetime, some people have wrestled with Jesus' divine nature, while others have a harder time accepting His human nature. Scripture affirms both: Jesus is divine, and Jesus is human. The early Christians debated and struggled and meditated about this. How can Jesus be both God and man? But the Son of God did take on flesh and become human. Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent human. We can't explain this mystery physically or scientifically. It is one of the most wondrous and unique things about Christianity.

Second, this passage talks about Jesus being "tempted." This can be tricky to understand because of the way we often use the word "tempted" in the English language. When we say, "I was tempted," we usually mean, "I really wanted to," or "I desired to," or even, "I was going to." But when Scripture talks about Jesus being tempted, it's referring to external attempts to persuade Him, not internal desire. Jesus never wanted to do wrong. Outside forces—the challenges of life in this world, and the lies of the devil—tempted Him. English words that might better capture the meaning of "tempted" here are "enticed" or "baited" or "pressured." Jesus was "tempted" does not mean that "Jesus really wanted to do this bad thing." It means the devil enticed Jesus, or baited Jesus, or pressured Jesus. This is a very different concept. It's wise to be prepared to delve into these tricky issues, but don't allow yourself to be sidetracked by it. The main point of this lesson is that Jesus is our friend who understands us. Jesus was "tempted in every way... yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). That means He fully understands all that we face.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.



PREVIEW

Before the students arrive, hang up three signs that say “Parent,” “Best Friend,” and “Jesus.” The signs should be spaced about six feet apart from one another, if possible.

Use the U1L2 video either as students arrive or after the activity to spark discussion or attract attention. Greet students and make them feel welcome.

Instruct the group to stand up and gather together in the middle of the room.

I’m going to name a life event or situation. When you hear it, immediately line up behind the sign that shows the person you would want to be with in that situation. We’re going to go fast, so pay attention!

- **On the red carpet at the premier of your first film**
- **During a bad breakup**
- **Every morning**
- **When you get caught doing something wrong**
- **At a school dance**
- **On a road trip**
- **When you need laundry done**
- **When you’re hungry**
- **At the movies**
- **At your graduation party**
- **Before a big test**
- **During a natural disaster**
- **When you have a nightmare**
- **When you’re tempted by a strong desire**
- **When you’re feeling bored**
- **When you’re afraid**
- **When you’re angry**
- **When you’re happy**

Gather students together again and let them find seats as you transition to the teaching time.



CONNECT

When you think about Jesus, do you view Him more as a human being or more as the Son of God? Do you think of Him as someone who could have been your friend, or do you think of Him as someone to be worshipped? Why?

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

Ever since Jesus walked on the earth, people have argued about exactly who He was and is. Some people believe that because He was divine, He couldn't possibly be human. They argue that God's Son would never lower Himself to become flesh and blood and become part of this physical world with all its problems and imperfections. Jesus must have simply *appeared* to be human. Others argue that Jesus was human, maybe an extraordinary man, but nothing more than human. He was a great teacher, they claim, perhaps even the greatest teacher to ever live—but He was still only a man.

The first followers of Jesus, including those who wrote the books of the New Testament, insisted He was both. He was fully God and fully human. In addition to being fully human, Jesus was so much more. He was the Messiah, God in the flesh, something more than human. But He wasn't any less human than anyone else. This "both/and" nature of Jesus is a profound mystery and one of the most unique truths of Christianity. Jesus was both human and divine.

His birth was both miraculous and natural. He likely came into this world crying, as other human babies do. He got hungry and needed to be rocked to sleep. As a little boy, He must have fallen and skinned his knees. He helped with the chores. He learned His earthly father's trade, which was either carpentry or stone masonry. His hands got dirty, and He sweat like the rest of us. His muscles would have been sore at the end of a long day.

Although we don't know many details about Jesus' early life, the Bible tells us that He obeyed His parents and grew up in a small town. He would have learned Scripture at the synagogue in Nazareth and worshipped at the temple when His family made the long trek to Jerusalem for Israel's festivals. We can assume Jesus developed friendships and the challenges that come with them. Ultimately, He faced the worst things that humans can face: betrayal, abandonment, humiliation, pain, and death.

The words written in a book of the New Testament called Hebrews talks about Jesus' humanity. As you read Hebrews 2:10-15, consider what it says about Christ's ability to relate to us:

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. He says,

*"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the assembly I will sing your praises."*

*And again,
"I will put my trust in him."*

*And again he says,
"Here am I, and the children God has given me."*

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

What do you think “pioneer of their salvation” means?

We read that “The one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family.” What does Jesus call those who are made holy?

What does it mean to think of yourself as a brother or sister of Christ?

The last verse of this passage mentions “their fear of death.” Do you have a fear of death? How could a fear of death hold power over someone?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

This passage says that Jesus was made “perfect through what he suffered.” What do you think that means? Hint: “perfect” in Scripture often means “complete.”

Through suffering as a human, Jesus completed His assignment. Through abuse, ridicule, a violent whipping, and finally, a cruel crucifixion, the perfect God-man, Jesus, became our perfect Savior. Through His death and then His conquering death, He freed us from the fear of death.

Now we are going to read Hebrews 2:16-18. Keep in mind as you read that, in the days following Jesus’ death and resurrection, some people claimed that Jesus wasn’t a human but was an angel instead:

For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Rather than coming to save angels, Jesus came to save “Abraham’s descendants” — that is, people who have a faith like Abraham’s. (Remember that Abraham was the father of the Israelite nation—the one who led the Israelites to follow God.) Jesus had to be made like us, “fully human in every way,” so that He could represent us as a “merciful and faithful high priest in service to God.” In the practices of the Israelites, no one besides the high priest was allowed to enter the holiest place inside the temple. This was the place said to be where God would come and dwell. And only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, was the high priest able to enter the holy place in order to “make atonement for the sins of the people.”

According to this passage, why did Jesus need to become fully human?

How do we benefit from knowing Jesus’ temptations?

When you’re going through something difficult, what does it mean to have someone you can relate to, who has been through something similar, and who understands?

LEADER TIP

Allow older students to wrestle with this question, but be ready to provide guidance. The sense of the phrase here is that Jesus’ perfect nature was fully revealed through suffering. There was nothing lacking or missing from Jesus before He suffered, but through suffering, His courage, patience, and love were fully revealed in ways they never would have been had He not suffered.

LEADER TIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the Your View cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (**) after the small group time concludes.

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Think about the different stages of Jesus' human life. Think of him as a baby, as a grown man, and at the end of his life, suffering on the cross. How does this God contrast with the ideas of God presented by the religions of the world? How is Jesus different, for example, from the Buddha—meditating in a calm, serene, detached pose? How is the idea of Jesus different from atheism—the belief that there is no God who sees or understands or cares?

***Jesus wasn't just human. He was fully human. That means He was tempted. It's difficult to imagine, because He never did wrong, but that doesn't mean the world and the devil didn't try to persuade Him.**

Jesus faced all the things we face. He faced the temptation to overindulge, to be lazy, to be passive. He was tempted to speak when it was best to keep quiet, and He was tempted to keep quiet when something needed to be said. When people were cruel, He faced the temptation to have bitterness and resentment—a temptation we all face. He faced temptations to rage, to fear, and to fret. He was tempted by the allure of pleasure and of power. He faced loneliness, sadness, and frustration. You name it, He felt it.

The verses from Hebrews 4:14-16 tell us that Jesus was "tempted in every way," just like us, but with one key difference: He never gave in. Let's read this part together:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus never gave in. He is utterly unique in that way, the only complete human to ever live. But does that mean He doesn't understand what we face?

On the contrary, Jesus understands the strength of temptation better than anyone, because He is the only person who ever resisted completely. The only person who ever experienced the full force of temptation was the one who resisted all the way to the end.

Imagine two guys decide to stay awake all night. One of them doesn't make it. He gives up and falls asleep in the middle of the night. The other struggles and paces the floor and splashes cold water on his face and makes it all the way through to daybreak. Which of these guys truly understands how difficult it is to stay up all night?

Each of us has given in to sin at some point. We never experienced the full weight and draw of temptation, because we gave in before the end. But Jesus never gave in. Everything that temptation could possibly throw at Him, every ounce of pressure, the full persuasive force of every shiny lie... He felt it all.

Why is Jesus able to “empathize with our weaknesses”?

How does that empathy make Jesus a good friend to us?

What does it mean to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence”?

What is the result of approaching God with confidence?

**Have you ever endured a difficult challenge? How did you get through it?
Did any friends help you?**

Every age has its own unique set of temptations and challenges. What are the challenges you face today? What temptations seem particularly strong these days?

**Take a few moments to have students share what they discussed together.

Jesus is the Messiah who is there for us, not a far-away God who can’t understand what we’re going through. Jesus is the flesh-and-blood Son of God who has enormous compassion for us. In short, Jesus is our friend.

What does it mean to you to have a friend like this?

Think about the situations we talked about at the start of this lesson: times when we have a special event, or we are afraid, or we just want to have fun. Can you imagine Jesus being your friend in all of those situations? Why or why not?

How might it change the way you face your life if you remember that Jesus is your friend?

We do have someone we can go to when we need help—even when we might feel like we are completely alone in the world. We are never alone. Since Jesus is our friend, that changes *everything*.

EXPLORE

Before Jesus began His public ministry, He went alone into the wilderness for an intense time of prayer and fasting. There, the devil came to Him and tempted Him to deny His identity as the Son of God. As you read this passage from the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament, consider what it says about Jesus’ ability to empathize with our struggles. Take note of the sorts of temptations He faces and how He manages to resist. Read the questions on the board and discuss them in your group.

Split students into partner pairs or small groups and give them time to read Luke 4:1-13 and discuss the questions written on a whiteboard or paper.

LEADERTIP

This is a good opportunity for you to offer some perspective. How are things different for young people today from how they were for you? How have things changed?

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

*"He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."*

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

What three types of temptations did the devil present to Jesus?

How did Jesus resist each time?

What does this passage have to say about the importance of Scripture?

Close the time by giving the groups this instruction for prayer:

Take time to pray together this way. Form a circle with your group. Choose one person to close the prayer. Then go around the circle and name one kind of temptation that you are struggling with. For example, you might say "power" or "pride" or "pleasure." Then let the chosen person close the time in prayer by bringing these temptations to God and asking for His help to stand firm and not give in.



Imagine Jesus were living your life. What would He say if He were in your shoes? How might He respond to the challenges you face?

What would He do?

Take some time to jot down your thoughts in the Your Story section of the *Student Guide*.

Of course, we can't know exactly what Jesus would do if He were living our lives, but you probably have a better idea than you think. Ask God to guide you, then imagine Jesus were in your shoes, and then write about how He would live your life.

Give students some time to respond to this prompt.

Every single one of us will go through difficult circumstances at some point in our lives. We will face strong temptations, if we haven't already.

How does knowing you have Jesus as a friend help you?

How might thinking of Jesus as your friend change the way you pray?

Before you leave, let me pray for you: *May you experience Jesus as your friend this week. May you approach God with confidence, believing He is for you, not against you. May you feel free to open up to Him and to receive His counsel and comfort. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for Bible verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* for help in guiding them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

LEADER TIP

This activity might bring up some sensitive issues. Be prayerful, and prepared to be available, but don't pry or push students to share.

LEADER TIP

Conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in revelations about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Spiritual Growth

Who Is Jesus?

Our King

Quarter 3 Unit 1 Lesson 3

Matthew 21:1-17

CONNECTION

Jesus is our King who leads us.



REMEMBER

*"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth."*

Philippians 2:10



PREP

Jesus is our friend and our Savior, but He is more than that. He is also our Lord and King, the One who leads us.

Jesus loves us just the way we are, but that doesn't mean He intends to leave us that way. And if we're honest, who would want that? None of us is all we hope to be. The messages of "You're OK the way you are" or "You are enough" sound good on the surface, but these messages can especially leave teens cold, because inside, they don't *feel* OK. They don't *feel* like they are enough. It might prompt teens to wonder, "So is *this* as good as it gets?"

Of course, it isn't. Jesus has come to lead us, and following Him means growing, changing, taking steps, and taking risks. Rather than leaving us where we are, He intends to take us to someplace better. Following Jesus is a grand adventure!

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

whiteboard, dry-erase
markers

(optional: sticky notes)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

Jesus will lead every person who places their faith in Him. Forgiveness doesn't eliminate obedience—it changes the “why.” We realize that we don't obey God in order to earn something from Him or pay Him back for bad things we've done. We don't obey Him to earn His love; we obey Him because we love Him and because we trust He truly knows what's best. We don't *have* to obey Jesus; we *get* to obey Him! Anyone who comes to understand how damaging sin truly is and how good Jesus truly is gradually comes to view obedience this way. We *want* to follow Jesus!

Jesus also changes *how* we obey. We depend on Him to give us the strength to do what He asks us to do. “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

As you prepare to teach this lesson, get in touch with the reality of Jesus as our friend and King. Some of your students will have a harder time receiving acceptance and forgiveness. Others will struggle to believe Jesus really knows what is best for them and should be followed. Watch for those lightbulb moments when you have the opportunity to guide students into this fuller understanding of our relationship with Jesus.



LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

This lesson centers around Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, recorded in Matthew 21. Some celebrate and dramatize these events in remembrance of the last week of Jesus' life (sometimes referred to as Palm Sunday). Those activities could help us remember key details in the story, but they also could get in the way, because we might think we already know the story. This is true of adult leaders as well as students, so as you prepare to lead this lesson, take a moment to read the passage with fresh eyes.

The focus of this lesson is on Jesus as King, on His lordship and leadership; and this passage certainly illustrates that. But Jesus is also an utterly unique king. He leads like no other. As you read the passage, ask yourself: What was it like to be one of Jesus' twelve disciples? What was it like to be one of those shouting in the crowd? What was it like to be one of the Jewish religious leaders? What about the money changers and merchants in the temple, and the blind and lame people Jesus healed? How did they feel? Try to bring these events out of the realm of a familiar religious story and read them for what they are—an eyewitness account about the one-of-a-kind King, who leads us.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

LEADER TIP

Remember that all students may not be familiar with the events of Jesus' life. Point teens to the helpful Events of Jesus' Life tool in the back of the *Leader* and *Student Guides* to give students a quick visual overview.

PREVIEW

Use the U1L3 video as students arrive to spark discussion or attract attention. Greet students and make them feel welcome.

I want you to think of someone you admire. No celebrities or well-known historical figures. Think of someone you know personally.

What do you admire about this person?

Invite students to write these qualities or achievements that they admire on a whiteboard (or on sticky notes that they can then place on the wall). Point out any things mentioned more than once. As time allows, ask whether any students would like to tell the group more about the person they admire and why those particular qualities came to mind.

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

CONNECT

When we admire someone, we often carry a certain image of that person in our minds. In this lesson, we're going to look more closely at Jesus and at some events in His life, recorded in Matthew 21, that might seem strange to us. They might even challenge the image we have of Jesus in our minds.

The scene opens in verses 1-3 with Jesus and His disciples coming to a village on their way to Jerusalem. Jesus sends two disciples to another village to do something that appears quite unusual. (Let someone read these verses out loud.)

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

Because Jesus was God in the flesh, He knew both the location of the animals and the attitude of the owners—that they would be happy to let the Lord borrow their donkeys. And Jesus wasn't sending for the donkeys because He was tired of walking. There was a very specific purpose to His actions. He knew who He was and what He had come to accomplish. He knew all the ancient prophecies about the Messiah and was carefully fulfilling every promise. Let's read Matthew 21:4, 5:

*This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:
"Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

The prophet that Matthew referred to was Zechariah, who wrote one of the books of the Old Testament. Matthew quoted Zechariah 9:9 in relation to what was happening that day. “Daughter Zion” was a long-held reference to Jerusalem. Zechariah’s prophecy, as well as the accounts in Mark and Luke, specify that Jesus rode on the young donkey.

***Think back to Lesson 1, when we studied about Jesus being the Messiah, who fulfills God’s promises. What were some of the other promises and predictions Jesus fulfilled?** (He would be the great light to shine in spiritual darkness; The government would be on His shoulders; There would be no end to the peace He would bring; He would reign on David’s throne forever.)

Now let’s see what happens when the two disciples follow Jesus’ instructions (ask someone to read verses 6-11):

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem was an occasion of triumph. Some people took off their cloaks and spread them on the road, as a sign of respect. Others cut branches from nearby trees and laid them across Jesus’ path. (Note: Only John’s Gospel, in 12:13, mentions palm branches specifically, though the palm branch has become a familiar symbol linked to this Bible event.) **The crowds shouted “Hosanna!” Originally Hosanna was a call for help or rescue, meaning “Save us!” or “Save now!” But over time Hosanna grew from an urgent prayer to an exclamation of praise. And the crowds exalted Jesus as “the Son of David,” which was a popular title for the coming Messiah. The crowds were cheering for Jesus as if He were a superhero who had just rescued a runaway train. They cheered for Him like people cheering for firefighters saving a family from a fire. They cheered for Him as if He were a conquering king, home from battle.**

What effect did Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem have on the entire city?

How do you think your city or community would react if Jesus entered it like a king today?

LEADER TIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide View* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Ancient kings often entered a city with dramatic flair, mounted on a powerful warhorse and accompanied by a host of mighty warriors. In many ways, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem mimicked these victory parades. In other ways, His entrance was quite different. Try to envision this scene. How would Jesus and His entrance compare to that of earthly kings? What symbols or circumstances of this event say something about the different kind of king Jesus was?

Let's keep reading about what happened after Jesus entered the city, from Matthew 21:12, 13:

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"

LEADER TIP

If you split into student-led discussion groups, take a few moments to allow them to summarize their thoughts before concluding the lesson.

If you just looked at this section of Matthew 21:1-13 by itself, with no other information about Jesus, what would you guess about the kind of person Jesus is?

What occupation would you imagine Him to hold?

What amount of power would you think He had?

How does Jesus' behavior in verses 12 and 13 compare to the image of Jesus you have in your mind?

****Jesus cleared the temple courts because the people doing business there were known to cheat poor people out of their money. But besides that, He cleared the temple as a prophet, acting out a message from the Lord, which He hints at when He refers to the house of prayer being made a den of robbers. He was acting out the Lord's desire for the people to clean their hearts and worship God in truth.**

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Take time to read Jeremiah 7, from the Old Testament. Find the verse that corresponds to what Jesus quotes in the temple courts. What relationship do you see between this message from Jeremiah and what Jesus was doing or saying? What do you think the Jewish leaders in the temple courts might have understood from what Jesus said?

The events in Matthew 21 are considered a trigger for the events that would follow in Jesus' life, leading up to His death on the cross. As we read verses 14-17, think about how Jesus' actions and words might have affected the people around Him.

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

*"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,
"From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"*

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Why do you think the religious leaders were offended by what Jesus did and what the children said?

Place yourself in the shoes of a religious leader at the time of Jesus. Your whole worldview has been built on your understanding of the Scriptures and your obedience to religious laws. Why might Jesus' actions and words seem threatening to you? What do you stand to lose?

Jesus is our friend. But that's not all He is. He is also the King who leads us. Following Him requires obedience. Following Him requires submission to His wisdom and authority. And following Him sometimes means hardship or sacrifice. But it also means living the best life God has designed for us. It's the adventure of a lifetime!

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, talked about how Jesus humbled Himself as a human before God, even to giving His life on the cross. Because of His obedience and sacrifice, God then exalted Jesus to the highest place, giving Him a name that is greater than all other names, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10, 11).

What will God do with us when we submit to Him? What will Jesus do if we follow Him as our King? It's impossible for us to see all the consequences, but we can trust that our King will lead us well, and that ultimately, we will be with Him in His kingdom forever.

EXPLORE

LEADER TIP

A printable or projectable document with these Bible verses in it is available on *Digital Resources*.

We might be tempted to reduce Jesus to someone we can easily understand. Some people see Jesus as a friend, but not as our King. Others see Him as King, but not particularly friendly—as if He really doesn’t care about us. The real Jesus, the one who is revealed in the Bible, is our friend and our King. Think about these questions:

What would a relationship with Jesus look like if we viewed Him only as friend and Savior, but not as Lord and King?

What would a relationship with Jesus look like if we viewed Him only as Lord and King, but not as friend and Savior?

Read or project the following verses on a screen. Ask students to read each verse with you and jot down thoughts or images in their *Student Guides* that come from these verses. What kind of King is Jesus? What do we see in Scripture?

He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:14

Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.”

John 14:23a

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

John 18:36

He raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Ephesians 1:20, 21

They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.

Revelation 17:14



We're going to do an exercise to help us follow our King, Jesus, better.

This activity is designed to help students engage with Jesus as their leader. It works well as an individual journaling exercise, perhaps using space provided in the *Student Guide*. It can also work as a small group discussion.

There are three parts to this exercise. First, students will identify a step that Jesus is leading them to take. Second, students will assess the significance of that step. Third, students will make a specific plan to take the step.

- 1. Identify a Step. Name one thing you could start doing this week in order to increase your focus on following Jesus. Or name one thing you could stop doing this week in order to follow Jesus better.**

The thing you choose can be a small step. Jesus leads us one step at a time. If you aren't sure what to choose, check with a mature Christian who cares about you to help you identify one small step.

Give students a few minutes to complete this step before moving on to the next.

- 2. Check your "why." Why is this step important? What will happen if you commit to it? What will happen if you don't?**

Again, give students a few moments to write down their thoughts or discuss them with someone else.

- 3. Make a plan. What is one specific way you will follow Jesus this week? How often will you work on this? How will you measure whether or not you are being successful?**

After giving students time to work on their responses, encourage them to follow through with their plan.

As you go through this week, don't be discouraged if things don't play out exactly as you've planned. It helps to have a plan, but plans change. Following Jesus is a relationship, not a plan. But like any relationship, getting the most out of it requires commitment.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *My God and King, help us to recognize Your authority and leadership in our lives. Help us to praise You as the One who saves us. And help us to bow before You and follow You, one step at a time. In Jesus' name, amen.*

LEADER TIP

There are benefits to both working as individuals and working in groups. In group discussion, students may learn from one another's ideas and encourage one another. But they may feel freer to be completely honest if they work on their own. You know your students best—do what will work well for them.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool on *Digital Resources* for help in guiding them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Spiritual Growth

Who Is Jesus?

Our Answer

Quarter 3 Unit 1 Lesson 4

Acts 5:17-42; 1 Peter 3:13-17

CONNECTION

**Jesus is the answer
we can share with others.**



REMEMBER

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

1 Peter 3:15



PREP

How did you come to faith in Jesus? Who did God use to answer your questions, offer a timely word of challenge or encouragement, or pray for you when you really needed it? This lesson centers around the truth that Jesus is the answer we can share with others. Take a few moments to remember the people God used to help you believe. Offer a prayer of gratitude for the role they played. Think about all the people you are connected to relationally. Expand that perspective to include your students' circles of relationships: their families, friends, classmates, teachers, coaches, etc. Take a few moments to pray that God would use your students to share Jesus, who is the answer to our biggest questions and deepest needs.

This is an encouraging and empowering lesson. Jesus is the answer. That means you don't have to have everything figured out. You don't need to be able to answer every minute intellectual objection. You

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

index cards (one per student)

pens, pencils

(optional: colorful highlighters)

LEADERTIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

don't need to have all the answers, because you know the One who is our Answer. The most important thing we can ever do—for ourselves, as we prepare to lead, and for our students—is to point people to Jesus.



LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

Today's passage is a rather lengthy narrative—full of twists, tension, a large cast of characters, and high-stakes decisions. Be sure to read the story carefully, paying particular attention to the way Peter and the other apostles courageously point people to Jesus. There is useful theology and propositional truth in this passage, but don't miss the drama and the tension of these events.

This passage includes some complicated terminology. It mentions the Sadducees, Pharisees, Sanhedrin, and the high priest. The Sadducees and Pharisees were two different sects within Judaism. As a rough analogy, you can think of them as political parties (the Sadducees as religious "liberals" and the Pharisees as religious "conservatives"). Both groups were practicing Jews, but they had very different and often opposing viewpoints in their beliefs and practices.

We have a tendency today to view the Sadducees and Pharisees as the "bad guys," because they so often opposed Jesus and the apostles, but that is overly simplistic. There were Pharisees who followed Jesus. And these religious leaders were viewed as the "good guys" in their day. The passage we're looking at today features a prominent Pharisee named Gamaliel, who offered some very sensible advice. In real life, there are no completely *good* guys nor completely *bad* guys; there are only human beings, all of whom need Jesus.

The Sanhedrin was the ruling council, or the elders, among the Jewish people. And the high priest was the principal leader, who had very special responsibilities detailed in the Old Testament, most notably the privilege and responsibility to enter the holiest place in the temple to make atonement for the people.

It's good to be ready to answer questions about these groups and offices, but don't let this lesson become an encyclopedia entry about first-century Judaism! It's all about Jesus. This passage points to Jesus. He is the answer we can share with others.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.



PREVIEW

Use the U1L4 video as students arrive to spark discussion or attract attention. Greet students and make them feel welcome.

You may be familiar with the game show *Jeopardy!* All three contestants can see the answers, and they have to come up with the questions. Today we're going to get to know one another a little better with a *Jeopardy*-style game. Don't forget to give your answers in the form of a question!

Give each student an index card. Each participant must come up with an answer to the question, "Who is (their name)?" Encourage them to come up with two or three interesting, bizarre, or little-known facts about themselves that will make guessing the correct "question" difficult for everyone else. For example, one student might write this answer: "This person loves brussels sprouts, speaks fluent Spanish, and once rode an elephant," for which the correct question would be "Who is Sarah?" Or another student might write, "This gamer has visited 34 of the United States and once went 48 hours without sleeping," for which the correct question would be "Who is Javier?"

Give students a few minutes to write down their "answers" in the form of a statement about themselves, then collect them and randomly distribute one to each participant. Take turns reading the answers and seeing whether anyone can guess the correct question.



CONNECT

Today's passage of Scripture records a dramatic series of events from the time of the early church. In an attempt to grasp the intensity and truth of these events, we're going to work together to do a dramatic reading of Acts 5:17-42.

Assign students to different reading roles from the cast list below. For smaller groups, assign multiple roles to each student. Encourage them to read their parts emphatically, with passion. Make it fun!

Cast:

NARRATOR
 ANGEL OF THE LORD
 OFFICER (PRISON GUARD)
 BYSTANDER
 HIGH PRIEST
 PETER (YOUNGER)
 GAMALIEL (RESPECTABLE RELIGIOUS LEADER)

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

LEADER TIP

Consider printing multiple copies of this passage (provided on *Digital Resources*) and highlighting the various "parts" in a different color. If you are leading a group of younger students, it might be best for you to take the "Narrator" part and distribute the other roles to students. This will also give you the ability to keep things moving, and to be first to read some of the words that are a little more difficult to pronounce.

Explain the context of this story: not long after Jesus' death and resurrection, the apostles were preaching the gospel and ministering to the sick in Jerusalem. "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:16).

NARRATOR: *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out.*

ANGEL OF THE LORD: *"Go, stand in the temple courts, . . . and tell the people all about this new life."*

NARRATOR: *At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.*

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported...

OFFICER (PRISON GUARD): *"We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside."*

NARRATOR: *On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to. Then someone came and said...*

BYSTANDER: *"Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people."*

NARRATOR: *At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.*

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.

HIGH PRIEST: *"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. . . . Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."*

NARRATOR: *Peter and the other apostles replied...*

PETER (YOUNGER): *"We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

NARRATOR: *When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin...*

GAMALIEL (RESPECTABLE RELIGIOUS LEADER): *“Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

NARRATOR: *His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

*The purpose of the following discussion questions is to dig into what happened in this passage and get the story firmly planted in the students' memory. The point isn't to get through the questions, but to lead a fruitful discussion and make sure everyone understands the story.

Who is involved in these events? What individuals and groups make an appearance?

What happened? (Retell the basic plot.)

How do you think the Jewish religious leaders felt when they discovered the apostles had escaped?

How do you think the Jewish religious leaders felt when they learned the apostles went right back to teaching at the temple?

How did Peter's words affect the religious leaders?

How did Gamaliel's words affect the religious leaders?

Why do you think the religious leaders were so opposed to the apostles?

LEADER TIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

Now hear the words Peter wrote much later in life, when he was a much older man, from 1 Peter 3:13-17:

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Have you ever gotten in trouble for doing the right thing? What happened?

What does it mean to "give the reason for the hope that you have"? What does it mean to do this "with gentleness and respect"?

Why do you think it's so difficult to speak up on behalf of Christ and the gospel?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Compare Peter's words from when he was older to what he said before the Sanhedrin when he was younger. What similarities are there? How do you think his experiences as a young man informed his perspective later? What advice do his words in 1 Peter 3 offer us in order to live with the kind of courage he demonstrated?

****God's answer to the problems of the world was not a new-and-improved set of rules. He didn't provide new religious rituals or an updated statement of faith. He came in person. Jesus is the answer we can share with others. We don't need to have everything figured out, or to be religious experts, so long as we know the One who has everything figured out. People are desperate for hope, and if you have a relationship with Jesus, then you can be ready to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

Why do you have hope?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Every generation faces its own unique set of barriers to sharing faith in Jesus. What do you and your friends face today? What are you up against?


EXPLORE

Jesus is the answer. But what are the questions? We started our time together by playing a version of Jeopardy! in which our names were the “questions to the answers.” This activity will help us explore some of the big questions that Jesus answers.

Split students into partner pairs or small groups and assign a few of the following verses of Scripture to each group. You may have more than one group using the same Scripture. Ask them to use the verse to come up with the question that Jesus is the answer to. For some of these verses, it’s possible to generate multiple questions.

For example, take John 14:6: “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

Here are some questions that this verse teaches Jesus is the answer to: Who is the way? Who is the truth? Who is the life? The only way to come to the Father is through whom?

Here are other verses to explore. A printable page of these verses is provided on *Digital Resources*, so you can print them out and give copies to students. Or you can have students refer to the Own It section of their *Student Guides*, where these same references are provided for students to look up on their own.

“When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”

Matthew 27:54

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

John 1:1-3

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

John 10:10

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:5

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

LEADER TIP

Remember that all students may not be familiar with the events of Jesus’ life. Point teens to the helpful Events of Jesus’ Life tool in the back of the *Leader and Student Guides* to give students a quick visual overview.

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

John 20:31

“Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:11, 12

“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

Romans 8:34, 35a, 37

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church.”

Colossians 1:15-18a



Now that you have a better idea of who Jesus is and what life questions He answers, think about the people you know and the people you see on a regular basis.

Who has God placed in your life so that you can share Jesus with them?

Jesus is the answer we can share with others. We may not know the answers to all the specific questions a person may have or the problems they face, but we know the One who does! Even the apostle Paul, the extraordinarily brilliant church leader, wrote this to the Christians at Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:2): “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Take a few moments to think and pray about what people in your life you might be able to share your faith with. Make a list. Come up with at least three, but you might also be surprised by how many people God has put you in touch with!

What could you do to show care for them? What could you do to show them Jesus?

Could you provide a listening ear? Spend some time with someone who is lonely? Serve someone, or help someone complete a project? Part of following Jesus is learning to imitate the way He took time with people, cared for people, and gave to people. Take a few moments to pray about this and jot down what comes to mind.

Start every day this week by praying for the people whose names you've listed. Ask God to give you opportunities to care for them, and to share Jesus, our answer. Then live your life expectantly, ready for the adventure. God may prompt you to take courageous action or to speak up, but don't force anything. You don't have to!

If you pray every morning for opportunities to share Jesus, and watch expectantly, you never know what God might do. He often surprises us with very natural opportunities to share our faith. Your job is to pray, to pay attention, and to be ready to give the reason for the hope that you have. His name is Jesus, and He is the answer we can share with others.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May your eyes be opened to all the people God has placed in your life, so that you can share Jesus with them. May you be ready to give the reason for the hope that you have. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* for help in guiding them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

LEADER TIP

When you meet again, be sure to invite students to share any experiences they may have had of showing Jesus to someone. If even a very small group of students seriously engages in this practice, one of those experiences might encourage and energize the whole group.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

How Do Teens Relate to Jesus?

Unit 1 Resource Article

Your teens likely have a lot of things they associate with Jesus. If they grew up in the church, maybe they associate Him with cartoon images at story time. Maybe others believe He does not relate to their lives or struggles. Or perhaps some are more accustomed to hearing His name used in vain. Still others may question His existence because He didn't answer their prayers the way they asked Him to.

Whatever your teens have believed about Jesus, here are some things they need to know about Him in order to grow in faith. Share these things about Jesus with your students as they have questions and as you teach more about Jesus.

He's a Friend Who Knows Them

Imagine a friend who's experienced everything you've ever been through. That person understands our fears, joys, pain, and disappointments. Share with your teens that Jesus is that friend—the kind of friend we all need! He knows what they've experienced in the past and what they're going through in the present. Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthians that whoever “loves God is known by God” (8:3). And in Hebrews 4:14-16, we read these words:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

It can help teens to know that, even when they feel *no one* understands them, Jesus does. Jesus understands what it feels like to be tempted, and He understands what it feels like to have people hurt you or make fun of you or betray you. But it is also

comforting to know that, although Jesus lived as a human, He was the best kind of human.

The reason we can depend on Him is that, although He has intimate knowledge of what it is like to be us, He is not *just* like us. He is always truthful. He is always wise. He is always just. He is always loving. And because of His sacrifice for us, we who believe in Him and have claimed Him as our Savior through baptism can approach God with the confidence that our position before God is secure. We can always count on finding mercy there. We can always count on receiving grace—both *despite* the fact that He knows us and *because* He knows us.

He Never Leaves or Betrays Them

In a world of cyber-bullying and friends betraying one another in various ways, it's hard to believe that there is someone who will never leave or betray us. Share with your teens that Jesus is always with them. He will never walk away or change His mind about being their friend. Hebrews 13:5-8 says this:

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

*“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”*

So we say with confidence,

*“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?”*

*Remember your leaders, who spoke
the word of God to you. Consider the
outcome of their way of life and imitate
their faith. Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday and today and forever.*

Though the writer here begins with talking about contentment in regard to material resources, the words ring true for all kinds of situations when we may experience some kind of loss or desire for more. When teens are feeling left out or rejected, the words “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” can bring so much relief and comfort. And you can help them see this by pointing out ways God stays with us, by pointing out other people in the teen’s life who stay faithful, and even by demonstrating this yourself to the teen by being a consistent positive presence in their lives.

He Does Not Condemn Them

Teens likely face pressure to succeed and achieve—at school, in sports, in hobbies, in their jobs, etc. This pressure may leave them fearing failure. If they don’t succeed and achieve, will they still be loved? Will they still be enough? These fears and doubts and pressures can bleed over into how they think about God. But teens need to hear clearly that God does not judge them by the standards that the world uses to judge people. Our value is never in question in Jesus’ eyes. Share with your teens that Jesus does not condemn them. Romans 8:1, 2 affirms this:

*Therefore, there is now no
condemnation for those who are
in Christ Jesus, because through
Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit
who gives life has set you free
from the law of sin and death.*

The “law of sin and death” may sound mysterious (and possibly scary) to teens, but you can make it clear to them that this verse is just talking about the way of life before Jesus died for us and was resurrected. Before Jesus’ sacrifice, anyone who sinned would eventually die and be separated from God. But now, even when we fail and make bad

choices, even when we hurt each other, Jesus does not condemn us to death and separation. Instead, we can be forgiven, made whole again, and live forever with God.

He Listens to Them

Our culture offers a plethora of social media platforms to share information, but even so, many teens do not feel heard. They may post on social media but feel that no one actually listens to what they have to say. They may think they have to have a certain number of likes or followers in order for what they say to matter. Share with teens that Jesus hears those who believe in Him and call on His name, and He values their thoughts and ideas. He wants to hear from us, no matter how old we are, and He’s always listening.

*I write these things to you who believe
in the name of the Son of God so that
you may know that you have eternal
life. This is the confidence we have in
approaching God: that if we ask anything
according to his will, he hears us. And
if we know that he hears us—whatever
we ask—we know that we have what
we asked of him. (1 John 5:13-15)*

He Equips Them for All Situations

Teens may feel ill-equipped for struggles or challenges they face. They’re young enough to still be learning many life skills, but they’re old enough that adults are expecting more out of them. This tension between childhood and adulthood can leave teens feeling overwhelmed. Share with them that Jesus meets us in our times of greatest need and provides us with the strength and courage to move forward, no matter what the situation.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote about how we don’t need to be anxious about anything, but can instead rejoice in the Lord always (4:4-6). And we can do this because the “peace of God,

***It can help teens
to know that, even
when they feel no one
understands them,
Jesus does.***

which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). Paul then encouraged his hearers to think on truly good things (vv. 8, 9), and that by doing so the God of peace would be with them.

Lastly, Paul thanked his friends in Philippi for caring for him and supporting him. It is here that Paul declared, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (v. 11). And he went on to say:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (vv. 12, 13)

Encourage teens that they can also be content in every situation, whether they have a stressful schedule or are bored to death, whether they are popular or unpopular, whether they have a job or are totally broke. They can see what Jesus has brought to their lives and rejoice in that. They can think about the good and true and beautiful things there are in the world because Jesus came. They can be thankful for those who support them and care about them. And they can lean on the strength of Jesus through all of it.

Unit 2 // Character Development

Forgiveness

Summary

It's through Jesus that we have access to the greatest gift God has given us—the gift of the forgiveness of all our sins. Through His example, we can understand what it means to have real freedom and find peace, if not in the reconciliation with those who have hurt us, at least in the releasing of the pain and bitterness that came with the wounds they inflicted. Both forgiving others and asking for forgiveness from others are learned disciplines, and ones that we seldom master quickly. But thanks to our Lord's faithfulness, they are actions we will get to practice over and over, even as we are transformed by His grace.

LESSON 5: Forgiveness Brings Freedom

LESSON 6: Forgiveness Brings Relief

LESSON 7: Forgiveness Brings Restoration

LESSON 8: Forgiveness Changes Lives

Unit Video

You'll find an introduction to some of the questions and themes we will be discussing in the Q3U2 Intro video, available in *Digital Resources*. You may want to use this in various ways:

- Show it to your leaders and have an in-person, online, or text discussion about the themes before you begin the unit
- Send it to parents to introduce them to the unit material.
- Show it during the first lesson of the unit to introduce your students to the concepts.

Unit Resources

- "Helping Teens Walk in Forgiveness," p. 82
- Events of Jesus' Life, inside back cover
- Salvation Path in *Digital Resources*
- Special Needs Solutions in *Digital Resources*
- What to Do If You See Abuse in *Digital Resources*

Character Development

Forgiveness

Forgiveness Brings Freedom

Quarter 3 Unit 2 Lesson 5

**Psalm 103:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Ephesians 1:3-10;
1 John 1:5-10**

CONNECTION

God's forgiveness brings us freedom from sin and shame.



REMEMBER

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9



PREP

How often are we aware of our freedom? How often do we pause and imagine what our daily lives would be like if we were not free, but instead imprisoned?

When we first come to know Jesus, accept Him as our Savior through baptism, and realize that He died for our sins so that we can be free—so that we can live with Him forever—we may feel the joy of freedom. Before we get to that step, however, we have to realize that we are sinners. Each one of us must face the fact that we've done something displeasing to God. Perhaps we have hurt ourselves or hurt others. Our sin has separated us from God's goodness.

When we realize our sinfulness, it is natural and right to feel guilty and ashamed. We might also feel sad about things we've done or pain we've caused. Some people might feel angry—at themselves

SUPPLIES

bandanas, enough for half of your students

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

string (or yarn), enough for each participant

(optional: rags, paper)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

or at others through whom the sinful actions came about. It's good to recognize all the darkness that comes from sin, but it is not good to dwell in that darkness forever.

As teachers and leaders, we need to realize that some of our students may have been sitting with that darkness and those shameful feelings for a long time. Others might not yet have recognized their need for Jesus. As we lead students to an understanding of God's forgiveness, let's also check ourselves. Do our lives look like we are living in the freedom Christ offers? Or are we still holding on to the darkness of sin and shame?

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

There may be no other subject the Bible speaks on with such richness and depth as forgiveness. God's forgiveness is in fact woven throughout His Word from beginning to end. Over and over again, we see the pattern of people sinning and God forgiving them, taking them back as His people, and restoring them. The metaphors used to talk about and describe this forgiveness are often rich and deep as well—they try to paint for us a picture of expansiveness, of the never-ending power of God that allows Him to carry all our sins and also to cast them far, far away from us. As you teach, point out these images to your students. Point out the strong and clear words used about forgiveness, and talk with your students about why God may have wanted to use such words to help us understand. Why is it so important to know that *all* our sins can be taken away? Why is it important that the old is *completely* gone, and not just a bit different?

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

PREVIEW

As teens arrive, greet them. After at least six have arrived, involve them in a game of freeze tag. Divide the students into two teams. The members of one team will be identified by bandanas (or rags). The students will tie the bandanas around their arms so that everyone can see them.

Tell both teams that the object of the game is to tag as many students on the other team as possible. Once a teen is tagged, he must "freeze" in place—no moving at all—until

he is tagged again by a member of his own team. Then he can return to play. As other teens arrive, add them to the teams evenly. Continue playing until everyone has arrived; then play for about three more minutes.

You may want to use the U2L5 video from *Digital Resources* to spark discussion or attract attention as you transition to the teaching time. Afterward, discuss the video and/or the activity.

What do you think this video or the game we played tell us about forgiveness?

CONNECT

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

So today we're going to be talking about God's forgiveness and the effect it can have on our lives. But before we dive in, I'd like to hear your take on forgiveness.

What does *forgiveness* mean? How would you define it?

When we hear the word *forgiveness*, we tend to think about forgiving someone else or being forgiven by a friend or family member after we do something wrong. We might think about forgiveness as the way to release a hurt or offense. Or we might talk about it as a way of erasing the pain from something that someone did to us.

And honestly, one of the reasons we tend to think of forgiveness in those ways first is that it's easier for us. It's easier to relate to the idea of forgiving someone else than it is for us to think about what it means for God to forgive *us*.

Let's think for a second about the game of freeze tag we just played.

What happened when you were tagged by someone?

What were the consequences of being "frozen?" What did that state not allow you to do?

What could you do when you were "unfrozen?"

Living in a state of unforgiveness means we're stuck. It means we're kept from being all that we could be. We're stopped from doing all the things we could do. But God's forgiveness brings us a freedom that no one else can give us.

Think about a time when you did something wrong or hurt someone in any way. You don't have to give the details of the situation.

How did you feel *after* you realized you were wrong?

How did you feel *before* someone forgave you for your actions? Did it affect how you behaved toward that person?

How did you feel *after* that person forgave you?

Allow students to share their experiences. Some may be difficult or painful, so allow appropriate time for sharing.

The first step to understanding God's forgiveness is understanding *why* we need God's forgiveness. Let's read 1 John 1:5-10, from one of the letters of John found in the New Testament.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

We've all done things that are wrong. We've all hurt others. But our sins don't just hurt us or other people.

What do these verses tell us about how our sins hurt God?

Because God is perfectly good, He cannot be united with anything that is bad. But God also loves us, and He wants us to love Him and to be with Him. Our sins separate us from Him. And our sins can actually lead to others being separated from Him too. When we hurt, deceive, or tempt others, we can cause them to react in sinful ways.

But what happens if we confess our sins?

What do you think it means to be cleansed from all unrighteousness?

***God's forgiveness is different from how we forgive one another. When we forgive someone, we may be able to restore our relationship, but we don't have the ability**

LEADER TIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide View* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

to make the person new—to make it seem as if they had never done anything wrong. And in reality, if the hurt was very deep, we may even have trouble making our relationship whole again. Some damage is hard for us to mend and can take a long time.

But God’s forgiveness is complete. Through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, God’s forgiveness purifies us—making us able to once again be with Him and live in His light.

Let’s look at another way God’s forgiveness brings freedom. We’ll flip back to the Old Testament and read Psalm 103:9-12:

*He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbor his anger forever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Work together with the people around you and read over these verses again. Look for the things God does *not* do and the things God *does* do for us.

LEADER TIP

Some teens may feel that they have done things that make them unworthy of forgiveness. They may have been rejected by those they have hurt—even family members. Take time to repeat this message to them over and over—that God can and does forgive any sin, no matter how bad it may seem. If they have repented and received God’s forgiveness through baptism, look for opportunities to point out how you see them changing and living as a new person in Christ.

What does God not do?

What does God do?

What do these verses say about the freedom that comes through God’s forgiveness?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Psalm 103:13 goes on to compare God’s compassion with the compassion a father has on his children. How might thinking about God as a good father help us understand the way He forgives us? What freedom comes in the relationship between a child and a good father?

****It can be hard for us to fathom the idea that God completely removes our wrongdoing and that He doesn’t count it against us. We may feel like the things we’ve done are just too numerous or too bad for them to be removed. But that is the whole point of grace—just like the psalmist said it: God doesn’t treat us like we deserve to be treated. He doesn’t repay us according to the bad things we’ve done. Instead, He loves us freely and removes all of our wickedness.**

And when we read the Bible, we can find many examples of people who did terrible things, and yet God was able to forgive them and make them into new people. Think about the apostle called Paul—who used to be called Saul. Saul was a religious leader who actually persecuted people who followed Jesus. He physically

dragged people out of their homes and put them in prison. He wanted to kill Jesus’ disciples. But after Jesus appeared to him, Saul’s heart changed, he was baptized, and then he became one of the most powerful voices in spreading the gospel message of Jesus. His letters make up a large chunk of the New Testament.

Let’s read from one of those letters that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

Ask a student to read 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 aloud from the Bible.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

What do you think it means to be a new creation?

What does it mean to be reconciled?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Paul says God “committed to us the message of reconciliation.” The verses that follow go on to say this: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (vv. 20, 21). What do these verses tell us about how God sees us after He has forgiven us? What are we worthy to do? What are we free to do?

If you accept Christ as your Savior, confess your sins to God, and are baptized, He will forgive you. He will completely wash away your sins. He will make you a new person—but not new like a baby, with no knowledge or understanding. Instead, He will take your experiences, gifts, thoughts, and feelings and shape you into a person who desires to obey Him and become more like Him. He will make you into someone who is able to testify to the freedom that comes through God’s forgiveness.

Let’s read from another of Paul’s letters, this time from a letter to the Ephesians, people from Ephesus. I’ll read it through two times. As you listen to the words of Ephesians 1:3-14 the first time, jot down in your *Student Guide* or make a mental note of every word or phrase you hear that sounds big, or rich, or generous. As I read it one more time, stop me with a buzzer sound every time I get to one of the words or phrases that stood out to you, and tell us why you noticed it.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he

LEADER TIP

If students express interest in receiving forgiveness for their sins, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

LEADER TIP

If you have teens who have auditory processing problems, it may be good to have the words from Ephesians up on a board or screen at the same time as you read them. Encourage students to write the words as well, because the physical act of writing can help some students focus more on the words.

loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

After every student has had the opportunity to point out words or phrases, close the teaching time by emphasizing the significance of these words.

Blessed, every blessing, holy, blameless, love, adoption, pleasure, glorious grace, freely given, redemption, riches of God's grace, lavished, good pleasure, unity to all things... These are not stingy words. These are not words that describe a life meant to be hidden away, kept in the darkness. These are not words that are meant to make us feel guilty, ashamed, or small. These are words that are carefully chosen to let us feel the huge, limitless, amazing love of God for us. These are words that are designed to motivate us to become the people God created us to be—His adopted children, living in the freedom of His good pleasure.

LEADERTIP

Be sure that you and other leaders participate in this activity to help build relationships with students and to show that we all need forgiveness.

EXPLORE

Before class, cut a length of string (or yarn) for each student and leader (about 2–3-feet long). Tie several knots in each string (but not too tight). (Have some extra pieces of string available in case more people attend on the day you do the activity.)

Ask everyone to sit in a circle. Give each person a piece of knotted string.

We've all done things we regret. We've all sinned. We probably do so every day, or at least, every week. And every time we do something wrong or hurt someone, we need to ask for forgiveness. We need to ask the person we hurt to forgive us. We also need to ask for God's forgiveness to take away our sins.

In the strings you hold, the knots represent these sins. As you feel the knots in your string, think about each thing for which you need forgiveness. It may be a rash action, a rotten attitude, or reckless words. It may be something no one knows about at all. But think about these things—and think about how free you would feel if you knew you had been forgiven for what you've done wrong.

Give students a few moments to focus and think about their sins.

I'm going to read through some Bible verses. As you listen to the Bible verses, untie the knots in your string. As you untie the knots, notice how your string changes.

As students think of their sins, read the following verses from the Bible. It would be good to have these projected or posted on a board as well. The Bible verses listed here are available as slides on *Digital Resources*.

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.
1 John 1:9*

*You, God, know my folly;
my guilt is not hidden from you.
Psalm 69:5*

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God
is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23*

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.
Ephesians 1:7, 8a*

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
Psalm 103:11, 12*

ACT

When we live without forgiveness, our lives may get tied up in knots. We can easily get stuck in bitterness or anger or fear and feel like we can't be the people God wants us to be. But God's forgiveness frees us up. His forgiveness gives us freedom to stretch and grow and be useful to others. It gives us the freedom to tell others about what He's done for us. It gives us the freedom to accept our position before Him, to receive His gift of grace, and to look forward with hope to the time when He will bring unity to all things.

We're going to spend a few moments in silent prayer. As you pray, you might want to ask God to forgive you for the sins you are carrying around. Ask God to free you from any shame that is weighing you down. Remember that God is able to forgive every sin—no matter how big it may seem to you.

Close your time by praying for the students with a blessing based on 1 John 1:9: ***May you confess your sins and accept the freedom that comes from our God who is faithful and just, and who purifies us as He gives us His gift of grace. In Jesus' name, amen.***

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

LEADER TIP

Let students take the strings with them and encourage them to place the string somewhere where they will see it daily and be reminded of the freedom that comes with receiving God's forgiveness.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Character Development
Forgiveness

Forgiveness Brings Relief

Quarter 3 Unit 2 Lesson 6

Psalm 34:17, 18; Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 6:1-6

CONNECTION

**Forgiving others relieves us
from pain, anger, and bitterness.**



REMEMBER

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Ephesians 4:32



PREP

God is the author of forgiveness. Micah 7:18 says that God does not “stay angry forever” but delights in showing mercy. Because of this truth, we know that any forgiveness we can give others does not come from ourselves. It comes from God. He is forming our hearts to be like His heart so that we can love and forgive as He does.

Yet there are times when we try to hold on to anger forever, or at least, for a long time. Sometimes we avoid forgiving others out of pride—we think we are right, and we’d rather be right than humble. At other times, we may even hold on to anger out of fear. Being angry can be a way to cope with serious hurt that someone has done to us. And anger can allow us to separate ourselves from an abusive person. As you get to know your students, try to make time to listen to their stories and find out what pain or anger they may be carrying around with them.

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

heavy rocks (or books)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

Forgiving others can happen in moments or it may take a lifetime. But even in the most difficult situations, we should work toward forgiveness. Even when the other person doesn't deserve it? Yes, even then. Why? Because hanging on to hurt and anger can hurt *us* even more.

Spend a few moments listening to the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to show you the hurt and anger that are keeping your heart from being set free. Then, ask God to show you all that He has forgiven you in the past—and the things you need to confess now. Can you forgive as you have been forgiven? Let God, who shows us the example of true forgiveness, help you to delight in mercy. Ask Him to help you to become an example for your students of one who lives a life filled with His forgiveness and love.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

One of the most well-known positive traits of Christians that is actually noticed by the world is the ability to forgive. Stories sometimes make the news of victims who forgive their perpetrators or people who refuse to press charges against others or seek legal restitution and instead decide to restore or build relationships. The reason these stories make the news is because it seems so unusual—it goes against the norm of fighting for one's rights and claiming justice. But in God's Word, it seems that nothing could be more unusual than living in unforgiveness.

God never fails to forgive His people, no matter how unfaithful they are. Time after time, at moments when, should the roles be reversed, we would surely reach our limit and give up on the relationship, God instead has mercy and forgives. And not just a grudging, reluctant sort of mercy, but a lavish, compassionate mercy that shows how much He loves us! Because we have God's clear example of forgiveness in front of us, you would think we wouldn't need any other encouragement to forgive others. And yet we do. The verses we'll look at in this lesson will remind us of God's position toward us, but they will also help us to see that forgiving others is not just godly and good for others, but it's also good for us.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.



PREVIEW

As teens arrive, greet them. You may want to use the U2L6 video from *Digital Resources* to spark discussion or attract attention.

Let the students know that today we will continue to learn about forgiveness. Distribute heavy rocks (or books) to some of the students and ask them to hold the item straight out in front of them without putting their arms down until they have been given permission. Then divide the students into groups of two or three and ask them to answer these questions:

What could someone do to you that would be unforgiveable?

Can you forgive someone if they have not asked for forgiveness (and don't seem to want it)?

Give the students a few minutes to discuss their answers. Then ask each group to share their answers. Finally, allow the students holding the heavy objects to put them down. Ask them:

What was it like to hold that burden while you were trying to talk and interact with others?

Point out that holding on to unforgiveness can be a heavy burden that gets in the way of our ability to interact normally with other people and can cause us more pain. If you wish, this would be an appropriate spot for you to share a story from your own experience about a time when you didn't want to forgive someone.



CONNECT

It can be difficult to forgive, but God doesn't want us to be burdened as we go through life. He wants us to be released to live freely. He also wants us to have compassion on others. We can choose to forgive others because God has forgiven us. He has shown us how to forgive—even when it's difficult.

But before we talk any further about forgiving others, let's get one thing straight: Being able to forgive does not mean that what happened to you was OK. It does not erase the wrong done to you. It does not mean that there should be no consequences for that wrongdoing. It also does not mean that you should intentionally place yourself in a harmful situation. Sometimes we can learn to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, but their actions make it impossible or

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

LEADERTIP

Let students know that if any of them are in harmful situations, they should tell you or another trusted adult. See the What to Do If You See Abuse tool on *Digital Resources* for more tips.

unsafe for us to be in relationship with that person. You can forgive someone and still establish safe, healthy boundaries about how you can (or cannot) interact.

What forgiveness does mean is this: it allows you to be relieved from bitterness, and it allows you to be open to God's healing.

Think about some ways that people hurt each other in family or friend relationships.

What are some typical reactions to those hurts?

How can those reactions be like a heavy burden?

When someone hurts you, it's completely normal to feel angry, sad, resentful, or bitter. In some situations, nothing the other person can do will make the pain go away. But those feelings of anger, hurt, and bitterness can have negative effects on your life.

Choosing *not* to forgive others may cause you to experience some of these physical and psychological problems:

- headaches
- unclear thinking
- body aches and pains
- getting sick frequently
- clenching your teeth
- lack of good sleep
- lack of joy
- problems concentrating in school
- depression
- anxiety

God understands what pain and anger and disappointment can do to us. The psalms in the Old Testament are filled with expressions of pain and hurt. But even in the midst of discouragement, frustration, and anger, the psalmists cried out to God.

Ask a student to read **Psalm 34:17, 18**:

*The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.
The LORD is close to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Think about the list of negative effects of unforgiveness that we just heard. Have you ever experienced any of those things when you were angry with someone?

How might sharing your pain with God or someone else help you?

***Sharing the things that have hurt you does not make the pain go away. But it will help you begin to heal, and it can help you see a different perspective. You may want to talk with a trusted adult or a friend who gives you good advice. And you can always talk to God about your hurts. He knows your pain, and He cares deeply about what happens to you.**

God also cares about what happens among believers. When Christians hurt each other, the negative feelings that result can hurt the body of Christ. Unforgiveness can lead to divisions among people, which can lead to more hurt and pain. It can also lead to people being turned away from wanting to follow Christ.

Read Galatians 6:1-6:

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

Paul warns against being tempted by someone being caught in a sin. What temptations do you think you might need to avoid?

What do you think he means by "If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves?" In what way can pride play a role in unforgiveness?

How can making comparisons between people get in the way of forgiving someone?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Paul says that a person who is caught in sin should be restored gently. What do you think he means by that? What might it look like to restore someone gently back into your church body? What could be problematic for a church body about restoring someone too quickly or not taking proper steps to see that repentance has occurred?

LEADER TIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the Your View cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

****God wants you to experience the kind of peace that only He can bring as you release your hurt and pain to Him. He wants to heal the hurts that are weighing you down, like a heavy rock. Forgiving others can have positive effects on your life and the life of the church. Forgiveness can:**

- increase happiness
- improve physical health
- lower stress and anxiety
- decrease the risk of depression
- improve your relationships
- increase peace
- heal divisions among friends and family
- serve as a testimony of God's faithfulness and love

You might feel that forgiving someone is scary—maybe you fear how your relationship will change, or you might be afraid of getting hurt again. Or, forgiving might feel like a failure to you—as if forgiving is a weakness. But God will be with you every step of the way, and He will support you with people who love you. You don't have to be afraid or feel alone. And forgiving isn't weak. Forgiving someone takes a great deal of personal strength and courage. It's hard work, and honorable work, and sometimes requires a lot of perseverance. Thankfully, all of the qualities needed to forgive someone are readily available to us through the Holy Spirit.

When you are ready, you can let go of your hurt. God will help you. He wants to lift the burden of pain, anger, and bitterness from you. He knows that refusing to forgive will continue to weigh you down and cause you greater stress. Listen to these words of Jesus from Matthew 11:28-30:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What do you think? Would you rather carry your burdens on your own or trade with Jesus for His yoke?

What is your idea of "rest for your souls?" What would that feel like to you? Have you ever experienced a restful soul?

By this time in Jesus' ministry, He had already faced strong opposition and ridicule. He had been called names and been accused of being in alliance with the devil. He would have had every right to be angry and bitter and offended and hurt. But instead, He had compassion on the crowds He encountered (9:36), He sent out His disciples to help and heal and teach people (10:1-8), and He offered this invitation to the weary and burdened (11:28-30).

We can follow Jesus' example of strength and humility. We can take the steps we need to forgive others. And we can ask God to lift the burden of negative feelings and stress from us. Forgiveness can bring us the relief we need.

EXPLORE

Pass out the heavy rocks again, but this time direct two or three people to hold the heavy items together. They should keep holding them up together while you speak.

Everyone has been hurt by others at one time or another. This hurt often leaves us in a dark and sad place. Think about a hurt you have. Maybe you feel hurt because you've been abused. Maybe you feel angry because someone left your family or rejected you. Maybe your pain comes from having a friend lie about you to others. It can be any pain you have experienced, big or small.

It takes courage to forgive. But forgiveness releases your pain and hurt. It allows you to begin to replace the negative emotions with peace and joy.

When you ask for God's help to forgive, He can heal your heart. He understands what it's like to be hurt. He also knows what it means to forgive. Because God forgave us, we can forgive others who have hurt us. We can also lean on the support of others we know who have been through similar circumstances and who are willing to pray for us.

Invite the students to repeat the phrase from Matthew 11:28: "I will give you rest." As they repeat this phrase, walk around and relieve the students of their heavy rocks.

With God, we can exchange our burdens for rest. The weight of anger, hurt, and bitterness is heavy and difficult to carry. God can carry that burden for you.

Remember—forgiving does not erase the wrong that a person did to you. The other person may never know that you have forgiven them. Forgiving does not mean that you have to talk to or have a relationship with the person who hurt you. It does not mean you are giving that person permission to continue hurting you. It does mean that you are letting go of your pain and allowing the healing process to begin.

Ask the group to form a circle with space between each person. Direct students to clench their fists tightly at their sides, as if they were holding onto a heavy load.

Close your eyes. Wait until everyone has eyes closed and appears to be listening.

We will spend a couple of quiet moments deciding if we are ready to take a step toward forgiving others. Our clenched fists are like the rocks of pain and anger that come from not forgiving others.

LEADER TIP

Ask a volunteer to make a note of students who are holding out their hands and wanting help with forgiveness. Make a plan to touch base with them individually this week.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

During this time, talk to God silently about your burdens. If you would like to release your hurt to God, ask Him to help you forgive. As you do, open your fists and relax your fingers.

If you would like to talk to someone to get help with knowing how to forgive, hold your fists out in front of you.

If you are still struggling with your pain, if you are still too angry, and if you're not sure if you're ready to forgive and release this to God, keep your hands where they are. Ask God to help you be ready.

ACT

Learning to forgive others may be one of the hardest tasks you'll ever have to learn. But like any other discipline, the more you practice forgiveness, the easier it will come to you.

This week, take some time to jot down your thoughts about our discussion today. You can use pages in your *Student Guides* or your own notebook. Think about people you may need to forgive and write down their names. Pray for those people, asking God to help them know peace and rest too. And ask God to help you see what steps you need to take to release any pain, anger, or bitterness that you may still be holding onto.

Close your time by praying for the students with a blessing based on Ephesians 4:32: ***May you be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Jesus has forgiven you. In Jesus' name, amen.***

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.



LEADER'S THOUGHTS

Whether on paper or in your mobile device, remember as you are leading to take time to stop and note what's happening with your students. Jot down special events they have mentioned, prayer requests, any behavioral red flags, or family needs. Pray for each student by name—try to pray for each one at least once a week.

Also think about what's going well in your teaching sessions and what's not working. Make plans to adapt as needed—for example, change the order of segments around, or add more time for small groups or more time for large group gatherings. Ask your students what they think and consider their answers—but balance that with the awareness that students are often not able to be objective about what they need to learn. Most of all, pray, pray, pray!

Character Development

Forgiveness

Forgiveness Brings Restoration

Quarter 3 Unit 2 Lesson 7

Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 7:8-13; 13:9-11

CONNECTION

Asking for forgiveness helps restore relationships.



REMEMBER

“Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

2 Corinthians 13:11



PREP

It’s difficult to forgive those who have mistreated us. It can be equally difficult to ask for forgiveness from those we have mistreated. Though God does not specifically command us in the Bible to ask for forgiveness from others, each sin we commit against others is ultimately a sin against God. The only way we can experience a complete, loving relationship with Him is by confessing our sins to Him and by asking for forgiveness from others.

Is there someone in your life whose forgiveness will lighten the burden on your heart? Is there someone who has been hurt by your choices and could begin to heal through your apology? You can show God’s love by asking for forgiveness. Though confessing your wrongdoings to another person doesn’t guarantee you’ll receive their forgiveness—and you shouldn’t expect that—it’s often the first

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

step that leads to reconciliation and restoration of broken relationships. Besides that, confessing your sins before God can transform your heart. He is loving and good and influences us to be loving and good. Only His love can cleanse us of our past sins, and only His love can help us to change our behavior in the future.

As you prepare for the lesson, ask God to give you a heart of humility, repentance, and forgiveness. Ask Him to help you to open the doors of forgiveness for your students, some of whom could be dealing with abandonment, betrayal, pain, and loss. Pray that God will help you to show them that true forgiveness comes from Him. His love can heal all of their wounds and make them whole again.



LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

In many ways, Psalm 51 is a master class in asking for forgiveness. Of course, it was written by a master. David had plenty of practice asking God to forgive and restore him, since he disobeyed the Lord on multiple occasions, sometimes in some pretty major ways—through adultery, murder, theft, betrayal, and deceit, among others. As you study this psalm with your students, it may be helpful to give some background on the author.

Explain to your students that David as a boy had a close relationship with God—so close, that God hand-picked him to be king of Israel, and then David fought a giant of an enemy with the Lord's help. Then somewhere along the way, David allowed power and pride to lead him away from going after the heart of God. But his story didn't end there.

Through the psalms we can see both his struggle to overcome sin and his desire to be in relationship with God. And we know God stayed with David and restored him, as some of David's last words to his son Solomon show the importance of God in his life: "So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:2, 3). If God can restore a sinner like David, he can restore any of us. And if we can come to God and ask His forgiveness, then we should also be able to ask for forgiveness from our brothers and sisters on this earth.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

PREVIEW

You may want to use the U2L7 video from *Digital Resources* as students arrive to attract attention or spark discussion. Let them know that today you will continue to learn about forgiveness.

Agree or disagree? Sometimes the simple words, “I’m sorry,” are the hardest words to say. (Let teens have time to shout out whether they agree or disagree.) **We’re going to have a few minutes of “sorry story time.” Tell the group a story about a time when...**

- **you had to say, “I’m sorry” and it was either easier or harder than you thought it would be.**
- **someone apologized to you in a remarkable way.**
- **you were forced to ask for forgiveness when you didn’t really mean it.**

Give students time to share their stories with the group.

CONNECT

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

No matter how good and healing it can be to have someone apologize to us after hurting us, somehow, we may find it extremely difficult to be aware of our own need to ask for forgiveness. We often feel reluctant or even downright resistant to take the step of making an apology. But saying you’re sorry is an important skill to learn, and it’s usually the first step in restoring a broken relationship.

Sometimes we hurt other people without intending to. We do something selfish, angry, or prideful without thinking about how our actions will affect someone else. Sometimes we hurt other people on purpose. We are hurting, so we want someone else to hurt too. Whether we caused the hurt on purpose or without intending to, hurting people damages our relationships with others and our relationship with God.

Ask the students to find partners and share their answers to the following questions. Let them know that they do not have to give details about what happened, only the answers to the questions. Give them 3–4 minutes to discuss their thoughts.

Have you ever asked a person to forgive you for something you’ve done?

What happened after you asked for forgiveness?

How did you feel afterward?

Asking for forgiveness can bring reconciliation. This means that the relationship with the person we've mistreated begins to be restored. The person forgives us, and our relationship continues. It may take a while for emotional wounds to heal, and it will definitely take time to rebuild trust. But making an apology starts the process.

Have you ever asked a person for forgiveness and been rejected or ignored?

How did you feel then?

There may be many reasons a person might refuse to forgive someone. You cannot force or manipulate someone into granting forgiveness. But your attitude and actions can play an important role in restoring a relationship.

Let's look at one of the psalms in which David asks God for forgiveness. David was the king of Israel, chosen by God especially for that position. But David, like the rest of the Israelites, didn't always follow God. There were many times when he made terrible choices or gave into temptations that drew him away from obedience to God.

***Let's read Psalm 51 together. As we read David's words, notice his attitudes and actions around asking for forgiveness.** Ask a student to read verses 1-4.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.*

What words does David use to describe God?

What words does David use to describe his sin?

David shows an attitude of humility and repentance as he approaches God in prayer. He gives respect to God and talks about Him as being right and just.

Notice some things David *doesn't* do:

LEADERTIP

*Instead of continuing to teach the lesson yourself, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in small groups. Students can use the *Student Guide View* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (**) after the small group time concludes.

LEADERTIP

You may need to allow time for your students to look up the meaning of words they may not be familiar with, such as *transgressions* and *iniquity*. Encourage them to restate the verses in their own words to help increase their understanding.

LEADERTIP

Explain to students that *hyssop* was a plant that was used in purification rites by the ancient Jews. The mention of hyssop here indicates that David is asking for a spiritual cleansing rather than a physical one.

- He doesn't treat the situation lightly.
- He doesn't gloss over his own actions.
- He doesn't bring anyone else into the picture—he keeps the focus on himself and God.

Ask a student to read verses 7-12.

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

What do these words indicate about David's desire to be restored to God: joy, gladness, rejoice?

What do these words and phrases indicate about what David hopes God will do for him: *cleanse me with hyssop, wash me, whiter than snow, blot out, pure heart, renew*?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

What do you notice about the requests that David makes of God? For example, are they specific or vague? Are they for the purpose of rebuilding the relationship or are they self-serving? What do the words David uses reveal about what is in his heart?

**Ask a student to read verses 16 and 17.

*You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.*

What does David say God does *not* delight in?

Does this surprise or confuse you? Why?

What kind of sacrifice does David say God will not despise?

What do you think is the difference between the two kinds of sacrifices mentioned here?

When we've done something wrong and sinned against God, what God most wants from us and for us is a restored relationship. Like any relationship, there are two sides to it. There are things that we need to do as the offender, and there are things God needs to do as the One being offended. David showed us the proper way to take that first step of asking for forgiveness:

- He came with the right attitude, one of humility and remorse.
- He came with the right words, confessing his wrong plainly and honestly—not covering up his mistakes.
- He came with the right motivation—to renew and restore the relationship.
- He came with the right heart—broken and repentant.

Notice that we don't see in Scripture that David received an audible answer to this prayer. However, we know that our God is a forgiving and merciful God, and that His love for us never fails. But humans aren't perfect, and aren't always able to forgive, even when a person comes with a right attitude, the right words, the right motivation, and a right heart.

Why is it important to ask for forgiveness, even if the person is unlikely to forgive you?

How can the practice of asking for forgiveness help you?

Though asking for forgiveness is just one step in bringing restoration—either between you and God, or between you and another person—it's an essential step that also helps shape you into the kind of person who can bring peace and healing and restoration to others. It shapes you into the kind of person who can love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength—and who can love others as yourself. Asking for forgiveness, like granting forgiveness, is ultimately an act of love.



EXPLORE

Before we can ask for forgiveness sincerely, we have to recognize what we did that was wrong. For some of us, that might take some soul-searching and some imagination, because it's not always obvious why something we did might have caused harm, especially when we were operating with the best of intentions. Discovering how we might have hurt someone else might require us to listen carefully, not just to the person's words, but to their feelings. We also need to imagine ourselves in their shoes, and to pray, asking God to show us through Scripture and thoughtful contemplation how our actions might have affected others.

LEADER TIP

Allowing teens to listen to relevant songs during this exercise could help them to focus. See the links to the lists of suggested songs for each unit in *Digital Resources*.

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul expressed some concern that the believers there might have lost their way. He wrote this in 2 Corinthians 12:20, 21:

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

But earlier in the letter, we see Paul writing in a perhaps surprising yet encouraging tone about the idea of sorrow that leads to repentance.

Read 7:8-13:

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.

In order to get a glimpse of that “godly sorrow” that brings repentance and leads to salvation, and to understand the contrast to worldly sorrow, we’re going to take a few minutes to practice praying as a lament before God. A lament is an expression of sorrow or complaint, often written in the form of a poem or a song.

You can write out your prayer, poem, or song of lament in the space provided in your *Student Guide* or on a separate piece of paper. Here are some steps to help you:

- 1) Think about a specific person who has recently expressed anger, sorrow, disappointment, or general displeasure because of something you did. Write about the person and about the person’s feelings.**
- 2) Write in clear terms what you did that produced the negative reaction.**
- 3) Imagine what the other person was feeling and how they were affected by your actions or words. Write about those consequences as a form of apology.**

- 4) Imagine how your actions may have hurt God and write about that.
- 5) Write a request to the person to forgive you and restore the relationship.
- 6) Write a request to God to create a new heart within you and restore your relationship with God.

Paul closed his letter to the Corinthians by saying this in 13:9-11:

We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

ACT

Striving for full restoration means taking time to acknowledge our wrongs, humbling ourselves to ask for forgiveness, and making peace through actions and attitudes that demonstrate repentance and a new spirit for creating healthy, whole relationships.

How can you strive for restoration this week?

Let students brainstorm ideas for ways they can work toward restoring their relationships. Here are some answers that could be beneficial:

- write out more prayers of repentance
- ask for forgiveness
- serve someone whom you have hurt in the past
- pray through Psalm 51
- offer to listen to a person's complaints about you with an open mind and heart

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May you experience godly sorrow on your journey toward being fully restored—first to God the Father, and then to any others in this world. God grant you the peace and joy that comes with forgiveness and restoration. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

Character Development

Forgiveness

Forgiveness Changes Lives

Quarter 3 Unit 2 Lesson 8

Genesis 50:15-21; Luke 5:17-26; Acts 2:37-47; Romans 12:1, 2

CONNECTION

God's forgiveness can bring extraordinary change.



REMEMBER

"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38



PREP

A woman named Corrie ten Boom was put into a prison camp during World War II. Some of her family members died in the camp, but Corrie was released by mistake just one week before she would have been executed. Many years later, one of the former guards approached her. He told Corrie that he had become a Christian and asked for her forgiveness. Anger boiled inside of her. But then she realized that not forgiving him was a sin. She wrote, "Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more?"

Corrie ten Boom's stories of her life during and after the war have inspired many people to know Christ better. Her life and her stories, such as this one about the guard, reminds us that forgiveness can have wide-reaching effects. And forgiveness always begins with Jesus. We may not want to forgive, and we may not want to ask for forgiveness. But Christ paid the price for all sins. Are there people

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

shallow containers (ex: foil baking pan, plastic storage container, etc.; one for each group)

loose dirt or soil (enough to fill the containers halfway)

pitchers (one for each group)

large bucket of water (or a sink, if available)

paper towels (for cleanup)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

you have struggled to forgive because of your pride or anger? Do you need to ask for forgiveness but haven't asked because of your shame or lack of courage? Have you judged yourself harshly for something and not allowed God's forgiveness to cleanse you? Don't wait any longer—go to Him now. Then reconcile with others. Pray that you will experience the certainty that Jesus paid the price for all of our sins—and that His grace is enough. Not only is it enough, but it will do more than we could ever imagine.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

As noted in a previous lesson, stories of forgiveness are woven throughout the Bible. In the three stories featured in this lesson, we see how the understanding and extension of God's forgiveness to others can change not just the parties directly involved, but can have dynamic effects on those connected to the people, and even on those who witness or just hear about the act of forgiveness.

The distinction between the kind of forgiveness we generally experience with one another and the forgiveness that comes from God may be better understood in financial terms, which often appear in the Bible. When we forgive each other, we may release the anger and bitterness we feel, but we often still keep a memory of the event. In other words, we often keep a note on the person's account that can affect the credit we extend to them, and it can affect the amount of trust we allow ourselves to have with others. That kind of accounting can cause us to limit ourselves from fully engaging in relationships.

But God's forgiveness is not like that. When God forgives us, He wipes our records clean. He not only doesn't require us to pay our debt, He pays it for us. More than that, He gives generously to us, providing for us in this life, comforting us, strengthening us, loving us, and offering us the hope of eternal life with Him. And He empowers us with His Holy Spirit, entrusts us with His Word, and encourages us to go out and extend His love and grace and wisdom to others. His forgiveness doesn't just erase the red marks on our account, it changes our whole way of doing the business of life. It frees us to live for Him, instead of trying to earn our way into His heart. Remember to communicate this distinction to your students often as you teach this lesson: God's forgiveness changes lives because His forgiveness changes *everything*.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

PREVIEW

Before class, set up the containers on tables (enough for about every five or six teens) and fill the pitchers with water.

You may want to use the U2L8 video from *Digital Resources* as students arrive to attract attention or spark discussion. Let them know that this is the last lesson in the series on forgiveness. Ask students about what they have observed about water and its effects on the world.

What’s the largest body of water you’ve ever seen up close? (It could be as big as the ocean or as small as water in a ditch along a street.)

What did you notice about how the water affected its surroundings?

In nature, water moves and changes things around it. Water can even make stones smooth, carve crevices into mountainsides, or wash away whole neighborhoods. Take turns pouring water from these pitchers on the soil in the containers. Notice what happens to the soil and to the water. Try pouring the water at different speeds or using more or less of it (but try not to make a mess outside the containers!).

If you had to compare how forgiveness works with how water works, what would you say about that?

CONNECT

Like forgiveness, water can come slowly and make small changes on its surroundings, or it can come all at once and cause dramatic change. The forgiveness we give to others can sometimes take a long time and a lot of work. But God’s forgiveness comes on us with the full force of His love and power—and it changes us immediately. We go from being sinners caught up in our sin and limited in our lives to being free people—with access to all of God’s wisdom, love, and strength, and looking forward to eternal life with Him. Sometimes it may take us a while to get used to this new freedom and to understand what it means for us. When we repent and accept Jesus’ sacrifice through baptism, God washes our sins away immediately and offers us new lives. As Peter said in Acts 2:38:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

LEADER TIP

If you live in an area that’s been recently affected by floods or storms, you may want to bring those experiences up as examples. However, be sensitive to any students whose families may have suffered losses due to natural events.

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

LEADER TIP

Remember: you know your group best. If you need to stay together, do that. If it seems like too much reading for the abilities of your group, present one or more of the Scripture selections as a quick summary. Do what's best for your context.

LEADER TIP

*If you choose to use small groups, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in their groups. Students can use the *Student GuideView* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

God's forgiveness changes our lives in amazing ways. But what about the forgiveness we offer others? How can that change us too? Here are some specific ways that having forgiveness toward others can change us:

- **It will help us to have healthier relationships.**
- **We'll experience less anxiety, stress, and hostility towards others.**
- **We'll be more likely to have healthier blood pressure and a stronger immune system.**
- **It will make us less prone to depressive episodes and more positive about ourselves and others.**

All of these changes not only affect us, but they affect others around us as well. When we are healthier, happier, less stressed people, we can have healthier, happier, and less stressful interactions with others.

Divide the students into three pairs or small groups for the rest of the lesson time.

***We're going to take a look at three examples of forgiveness in the Bible. As we look at these, I want you to keep an eye out for these two main things:**

How did God's forgiveness affect the person being forgiven?

How did God's forgiveness affect others around that person?

One of the groups will look at an interaction between Joseph and his brothers from Genesis 50:15-21. One of the groups will look at the story of Jesus healing the man who was paralyzed from Luke 5:17-26. The third group will look at the story of some of the first Christians from Acts 2:37-47. Instruct each group to use the same questions as they read their passages, however some groups may need to go back and review more of the story to answer the questions. Be available and offer to help if any group gets stuck.

As you read your assigned verses, remember to think about some things that will help you understand the story better. You might have to go back and read some previous verses in order to gain a better idea of what's going on (or ask me or one of the other leaders for help). See if you can find the answers to the following questions. Be able to retell the story in your own words.

Who are the main people involved in this event?

What do you know about those people?

What were their motivations or concerns?

What's the purpose of this story being recorded? What are we meant to learn from it?

Don't forget! Keep an eye out for answers to these two questions as well:

How did God's forgiveness affect the person being forgiven?

How did God's forgiveness affect others around that person?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Let students compare the stories presented in the three Scripture excerpts. How are they similar? How are they different? How do you think the stories might have changed if forgiveness was not offered? How would the lack of forgiveness have affected the people directly involved in these stories? How might it have affected those who heard about the stories later?

The passages are included here for reference. Allow the groups to have time to read through their verses and answer the questions together. Then ask a volunteer from each group to share their findings with the rest of the class.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Genesis 50:15-21)

One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat

LEADER TIP

A summary of the backstories of the main characters in each of the passages is included in *Digital Resources*. You might find that it's helpful to print this off and give each group the relevant section so they have an easy reference for some of the questions.

and go home.” Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” (Luke 5:17-26)

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:37-47)

****The one thing that all these stories share is that people felt the impact of God’s forgiveness in remarkable ways. Some people were convicted by this gift of forgiveness. Some people were confused by it. And others were encouraged and challenged by it.**

Ask students to stay in their groups as you enter into a time for them to express themselves through prayer and other forms of worship or reflection.

LEADERTIP

Allowing teens to listen to relevant songs during this exercise could help them to focus.



EXPLORE

God’s forgiveness can transform your life. Even in our most difficult situations, when we release our anger and pain to God, we can experience His grace and peace. And when we are feeling ashamed or like we have failed, God’s forgiveness can free us and remind us who He has created us to be.

In your groups, answer these questions:

If you have received God’s forgiveness, talk and/or write about how that has made a difference in your life. What has God’s forgiveness done for you?

If you have been forgiven by another person, tell and/or write about how that affected you.

If you have offered forgiveness and grace to another person, talk and/or write about what that experience did for you and how you think it affected the other person.

LEADER TIP

The three questions here are also provided on *Digital Resources* as a printable file and as a mobile phone screen image for you to give your students.

Romans 12:1, 2 says this:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul tells the Romans to think about themselves “in view of God’s mercy.” God’s mercy, grace and forgiveness are offered to us—the ones who deserve punishment. This changes everything! It changes how we look at others. It changes how we think about our relationship to the Creator and His creation. And it should also change how we look at ourselves.

Think about how you have been transformed by God’s mercy. If you want, draw an image in your *Student Guides* that represents how you were before receiving God’s forgiveness, or how you might be if you had no forgiveness. Then draw an image to represent you as a person standing in view of God’s mercy—with a renewed mind and offering yourself in true worship.

LEADER TIP

Encourage teens to share with one another, but recognize that some teens may not feel comfortable sharing in this forum. Allow teens to write their answers in their *Student Guides* (or on sheets of paper).

 **ACT**

Asking for forgiveness is not a one-time experience for us. It’s an act that we will have to repeat over and over again, because even if we strive to be the best people we can be, we will never be perfect. There will always be moments when we hurt someone or do the wrong thing or make a bad choice.

But Jesus’ one act of sacrifice changed the world forever. And the forgiveness that He offers to us will always be there. There’s nothing we can do to erase that forgiveness.

As you go throughout your week, think about how God’s forgiveness could change your outlook each day. Write these questions down somewhere where you can see them every day.

LEADER TIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

How will my day look different today because I'm standing in view of God's mercy?

How will I treat others today, knowing that God's forgiveness is for them too?

How might I show others today that God's forgiveness has changed me?

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May you stand solidly in view of God's mercy every day. May you always see yourselves that way so that you, through the grace of God can change your world. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

Helping Teens Walk in Forgiveness

Unit 2 Resource Article

The burden of carrying unforgiveness reminds us of our pain. It keeps us from living fully when we're burdened with a heavy load.

But we can be free—released from anger, pain, and bitterness. Forgiveness brings this blessed release and freedom from the heavy burden of guilt and grief. How can we help teens see that it's possible to live this way?

Our teens may struggle with unforgiveness for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they've been betrayed by a close friend. Maybe they've been hurt by a family member. Or perhaps something bad has happened to them, something they haven't told anyone about. Whatever a teen's story, you can point them to the freedom and forgiveness only God can bring.

Recognizing Unforgiveness in Teens

Teens holding onto unforgiveness may experience some of these physical and emotional problems:

- headaches
- unclear thinking
- aches and pains
- getting sick more often
- clenching teeth, even in sleep
- lack of good sleep
- lack of joy
- problems in school
- depression
- anxiety

Unforgiveness affects the way we feel, the way we think, and the things we do. Not forgiving others often hurts us more than it hurts the person we can't forgive.

Holding on to anger may prevent teens from getting along with others. Bitterness and resentment may keep them from enjoying even their favorite things. The pain that comes from not forgiving others may cause them to look and sound angry all the time.

They may lose hope and joy in their lives. When teens hold onto anger and pain, it can change who they are.

If teens are holding onto anger, you may also notice a sudden change in their friend group. For example, when arguments happen among teens, one teen may shun another. Friends who used to be inseparable may suddenly hang out with different friends. Teens can find themselves isolated during this process, or you may notice a change in a teen's attendance at youth activities.

The Fruits of Forgiveness

God wants us to experience the kind of peace only He can bring. We can release our hurt and pain to Him because He wants to heal the hurts that weigh us down.

Forgiving others can have positive effects in teens. Forgiveness can:

- increase happiness
- improve physical health
- lower stress and anxiety
- decrease the risk of depression
- improve relationships

It takes courage to forgive, but forgiveness releases our pain and hurt. It allows us to begin replacing the negative emotions with peace and joy. Because God forgave us, we can forgive others who have hurt us. When teens ask for God's help to forgive, He can heal their hearts.

What Teens Need to Hear About Forgiveness

If we ask God to forgive us, He will! Teens need to hear that we've all done things that are wrong, but the amazing thing is that God will forgive us! When we ask for forgiveness by confessing our wrongdoing, God is faithful to forgive us (1 John 1:9).

Because of God's forgiveness, we become part of His family. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are able to receive the gift of forgiveness, allowing us to become part of God's family. Jesus wants to set us free from the darkness of sin on earth as well. If we welcome His light, we can't hold on to anything dark—even darkness brought on us by someone else's sin.

God can help us to forgive others. If pieces of our hearts are in darkness, if we're holding on to pain—God's big enough to handle it. We can open the windows of our souls to His light and allow Him to clear away the darkness of our past hurts. God created forgiveness. He delights in showing mercy. Because of this truth, we know that the forgiveness we can give others doesn't come from ourselves. It comes from God. He's forming our hearts to be like His heart so we can love and forgive as He does.

Forgiveness for us means releasing a hurt or offense that has been done to us. It's like erasing the pain from the injury or offense. It means letting God determine the consequences for something wrong that has been done to us. It's letting go of anger and bitterness for the hurt we feel.

Forgiveness doesn't mean we should put ourselves in dangerous situations. Forgiving doesn't mean that what happened to us was OK. It doesn't mean that a wrong wasn't done to us. It also doesn't mean that we should allow ourselves to continue

to be harmed. Sometimes we can forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, but it is not possible or safe to be in relationship with that person. (As you are advising teens, make sure to provide them with sources for help if they are in a harmful relationship.) But when we forgive, it sets our hearts free to allow God to begin healing us.

Pray that God will expose the dark places of your teens' hearts that need His healing light. Pray that your students will feel the warmth of His love, which casts out all darkness and fills the empty spaces in our hearts with hope.

***God wants us to
experience the kind
of peace only
He can bring.***

Article written by Micah Renck.



Unit 3 // Life Skills Anger Management

Summary

Anger both eats up and expends a lot of energy, much like heat does. Whether we have a simmering anger that we keep locked up inside of us for too long or we have fast flashes of fury that pass as quickly as they come, our anger can do a lot of damage, both to the people around us and to ourselves. Decisions made in anger seldom are based on sound reasoning and thoughtful planning, or on our belief in and desire to follow Christ. But anger is a natural human reaction—and like all human behaviors, it's one we have to learn to control and harness so that it does not run away with us. Once we understand where our anger comes from and what it means for us, we may find too that good anger—godly anger—can actually lead us to a deeper, stronger connection with God and with other believers.

LESSON 9: Faith Through Anger

LESSON 10: Releasing Anger

LESSON 11: Responding to Anger

LESSON 12: Managing Anger in Healthy Ways

Unit Video

You'll find an introduction to some of the questions and themes we will be discussing in the Q3U3 Intro video, available in *Digital Resources*. You may want to use this in various ways:

- Show it to your leaders and have an in-person, online, or text discussion about the themes before you begin the unit.
- Send it to parents to introduce them to the unit material.
- Show it during the first lesson of the unit to introduce your students to the concepts.

Unit Resources

- "Anger Management for Teens," p. 122.
- Events of Jesus' Life, inside back cover
- Salvation Path in *Digital Resources*
- Special Needs Solutions in *Digital Resources*
- What to Do If You See Abuse in *Digital Resources*

Life Skills

Anger Management

Faith Through Anger

Quarter 3 Unit 3 Lesson 9

Isaiah 64:8, 9; Ephesians 2

CONNECTION

God can lead us through anger to deeper faith.



REMEMBER

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Ephesians 2:13



PREP

Boiling inside, fiery temper, tempers flared, hot temper, mad as fire, searing words, and so on—it’s no coincidence that so many of our metaphors for anger revolve around heat. Anger both consumes and expends a lot of energy, much like heat does. Whether we have a simmering anger that we keep locked up inside of us for too long (and then explode on anyone within earshot) or we are those hot-tempered sorts who have fast flashes of fury that pass as quickly as they come, our anger can do a lot of damage—both to the people around us and to ourselves. Words we let fly can cause long-lasting wounds. Decisions made in anger are seldom based on sound reasoning and thoughtful planning or on our belief in and desire to follow Christ.

Of course, anger is a natural human reaction. We can see times when Jesus also seemed to get angry. The emotion of anger by

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

4 buckets: 2 with water, 2 empty (different colors, if possible)

plastic cups (enough for each teen to have a cup)

masking tape

timer

(optional: paper, paper towels, construction paper, paint or chalk)

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

itself is not a sin, but the emotion can lead to sinful action if we let ourselves get carried away with it.

However, anger can also be a red flag for us, a kind of signal of something going on that we should pay attention to and perhaps, do something about. And anger, properly channeled and understood (or in some cases, overcome), can even lead us to discovering a deeper, more intimate connection with God and with other believers. As you prepare to teach this lesson, think about times when you've been very angry. What was the trigger for the anger? What was the object of your anger? Would you identify it as godly anger or not?



LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

As you begin this unit on anger management, take some time to look at ways anger is shown and discussed in the Bible. People have a tendency to think of God in the Old Testament as an angry God, whereas they think of God in the New Testament as all sweetness, light, and love. But anyone who has read through the Bible knows that that just isn't true. The God of the Old Testament is often tender and loving and forgiving. And the God of the New Testament in the embodiment of Jesus is at times furious (see John 2 and Matthew 21 or 23). But more than that, we sometimes seem to forget that Jesus *is* God—Jesus is the God of the Old Testament who destroyed most of all life on earth, who sent plagues, who struck down those who disobeyed, and whose justice may often seem, at first glance, rather harsh by today's standards.

That brings us to the next point, which is that it's important not just to know that God sometimes gets angry, but to understand what angers God in the Bible. God's anger is never like ours—flaring up at trivial irritations, raging out of our own selfish desires, or appearing for little to no reason at all. God's anger is usually reserved most for those who, as our mothers might say, should know better. For example, this anger is directed towards those in positions of leadership who fail to lead well, or worse, lead others away from God.

When we get angry about darkness in the world that Jesus would get angry about, it's essential that we not waste that energy on just words and feelings, but that we instead follow Jesus' example and *do* something to counteract that evil. Having a firm understanding of godly anger from a biblical point of view will help us to evaluate our own angry feelings and lead us to a closer relationship with God.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.

PREVIEW

If possible, do the activity outside. Before class, fill two buckets with water and place them on what will be your starting line. Set up two empty buckets some distance away. Ideally, use two different colors of buckets for the two teams (or tape two colors of construction paper on the buckets). Put empty plastic cups beside the buckets that are filled with water. Mark a starting line on the floor with masking tape (or, paint or chalk a line on grass). Then, time the activity yourself to see how long it takes you to carry a full cup of water on your palm to the empty bucket. Use this time as a guideline for how many seconds to give for the activity.

You may want to use the U3L9 video from *Digital Resources* either before or after the activity to attract attention or spark discussion. Let students know that this is the start of a new unit on anger.

When everyone has arrived, divide the students into two groups and go to your starting line location. Instruct the teens to each take a plastic cup and fill it with water from the bucket (you may need to provide more water if you have large groups). Teens should place the filled cups on the palms of their hands, with their hands out flat—no fingers touching the cups. Everyone should be behind the starting line. Then, give these instructions:

When I say “Go,” you must try to get to your team’s empty bucket on the other side as fast as you can, while spilling as few drops as possible. Once you reach the empty bucket, pour your cup into the bucket. The team that wins will be the one that has the most water in their bucket at the end of the allotted time. (See note above for the time guideline).

If time allows and the students are up for it, try the activity a second time.

LEADER TIP

Let teams help you clean up with paper towels, if needed. It’s always a good idea to give teens a way to help with the activities.

CONNECT

We’ve been talking for a while about the power of forgiveness, and we’ve talked about Jesus’ example of forgiveness—how He forgave us for our sins. But now we’re going to switch to a topic that is often the cause of the need for forgiveness—anger.

In the activity we just did, we saw how the water could so easily spill out of the cups—even a small shake or bump might be enough to make the water splash out, hitting other people or getting in their way.

Give me an idea of how you’d compare anger with the water in those cups. How is anger like that water?

What effects can our anger have on others?

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

When we are filled up with anger, our anger can resemble the water in those cups. Anger can easily spill over and come out in the words we speak or in the way we act. And when it does, it can have negative effects on the people around us.

But if you kept the water in your cup under control, and made it to the bucket, you were able to help your team fill up the bucket—maybe even helping them win the game. When we use our anger in controlled ways, it can help ourselves and others become closer to God in the process. We're going to break this down in a few ways.

First, let's read Isaiah 64:8, 9. Isaiah was a prophet; he delivered God's words to the Israelites. The book recording his messages is in the Old Testament. In the passages leading up to these verses, you can hear Isaiah essentially asking God to come shake up His enemies, but then also realizing that God's own people have acted as enemies to Him.

*Yet you, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Do not be angry beyond measure, LORD;
do not remember our sins forever.
Oh, look on us, we pray,
for we are all your people.*

Remember that Isaiah is not just talking to himself but delivering messages that the people of Israel would hear.

What do you see Isaiah doing with his words in these two verses?

What does he say about God?

What does he say about the people?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Read verses 1-7 in chapter 64. How does Isaiah characterize the actions and character of God? What does he portray about the actions and character of the people? How might the way he sets up these contrasts between God and people help his listeners understand their position before God? How might it help them to be led to repentance?

In these verses, Isaiah is doing at least three things: 1) He acknowledges God's power and authority; 2) He acknowledges the guilt of the Israelites (himself included); 3) He affirms their faith in God.

Isaiah acknowledges that God is the one in charge, the One who created us. And because of our sins, He has every right to be angry. But because we're also people who still claim Him as our God, Isaiah comes to God with the security

and confidence to ask for mercy—to ask that God’s anger not extend “beyond measure” and not last forever, but to see that we are His people. We belong to Him. We are His charges, His responsibility.

How does it make you feel to think you might be able to anger God?

How does it make you feel to know that you can come to God even when you’ve sinned against Him?

LEADER TIP

Realize that though some students have loving family members who demonstrate godly love for them, other students may struggle to see examples of that kind of love in their lives. Look out for these students in your group. Pray for them and show them God’s love at every opportunity, understanding that you may be the only constant person in their lives.

LEADER TIP

*If you choose to use small groups, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in their groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (**) after the small group time concludes.

Even when we have done things that would rightly result in God’s anger, we can be confident that we can come to Him. God is not like people—He will not lash out at us in anger or punish us without compassion or understanding.

Many of you may have people in your life who make you feel safe. You have people you know you can count on, even when you do things that might make them angry. Sometimes through that anger, you can actually see how much those people care about you. And when those people still stick around, you can see how much their love for you is faithful and trustworthy.

God is like that—except even more so and perfectly so. He gets angry about what people do to each other and how they hurt each other because He loves us so much. He cares about what happens to every person each day. But even in His anger, He still wants to be with us and have a relationship with us. He still wants us to come to Him. And He is always faithful.

Maybe we can see how righteous anger can bring us closer to God, but how can that kind of anger bring us closer to other believers? Let’s look at Ephesians 2. In this letter from Paul in the New Testament to the church at Ephesus, we see him trying to speak to a mixed group of people. Ephesus at the time was dealing with the divisions and struggles that occur when two different cultures—that of the Jews who had converted to Christianity and of the Gentile Christians (heavily influenced in the past by pagan beliefs)—merge together and try to become one.

***In chapter 2 of Ephesians, we see Paul referring to both God’s anger and human anger. Get with a partner or with a small group and read Ephesians 2:1-10 and answer these questions:**

Where do you spot God’s anger?

What would God have been angry about?

What happened to the people who deserved God’s anger?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Even though the people Paul was talking to might have been divided in their beliefs, how does he unite them in verses 1-10? In what ways are we like the Ephesians too?

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**Let the groups share the answers they came up with for the questions.

Paul united both the Ephesians and all of us who claim to be believers; we are all people who have sinned and deserved God’s wrath. But we’re also all loved by God and have all received His mercy and grace. When we look around and see the flaws and faults we have in common, it’s easier for us to also see how we share in God’s blessings and benefits. This also makes it easier to extend grace to one another.

Before we continue reading the letter to the Ephesians, let’s pause to talk about how Jews and Gentiles were (and are) different. Jews, unlike Gentiles, came from this background of belief in the one God, and they had a whole system of laws that they had built up, based on the law of God given to Moses in the Old Testament. One of those laws determined a physical difference that would set apart Jews, specifically Jewish males—that difference was circumcision. And when Gentiles started following Christ, some of the Jewish Christians were adamant that Gentile males should be circumcised too, to follow God’s laws. But those laws were made for the time before Christ, and Paul and other leaders made it clear that believers no longer had to follow these cultural laws in order to follow Christ.

With that understanding, let’s go ahead and read Ephesians 2:11-22 and then talk about these verses together.

Let students take turns reading the rest of Ephesians 2 and stop as needed to explain things further:

LEADER TIP

If students don’t understand the meaning of circumcision, a simple explanation is that a part of the male’s skin from around their private parts was removed (usually when they were still infants), and that this is also now a very common procedure that happens to many baby boys, no matter what culture they are from.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Which words stand out as indicating divisions between Gentiles and Jews?

The divisions between Jews and non-Jews could be very harsh, as people on both sides had passionate beliefs. Can you think of any divisions in the church or in the world today like that? How do those divisions affect people on both sides?

When people care deeply about something, it’s easy for that caring to become anger when they feel their way of life is being threatened. Have you ever cared so much about something that you felt angered by someone who had opposing views? Why did you feel angry?

What is the one thing that Jews and non-Jews had in common, the thing by which God “put to death their hostility?”

ZOOM QUESTIONS

How do you think knowledge and education about each other’s beliefs could have helped the Jews and Gentiles to depend on God more to unify them? List some beliefs which Jewish Christians and Gentile believers would have held in common about Christ. How could understanding their common beliefs help them to join together?



EXPLORE

When we're angry about important things, such as our beliefs in God, two things can happen: either we can get carried away by the emotions of anger and let ourselves build up dividing walls with others, or we can recognize what matters to us most about God and find peace in the common ground we share with others.

Ask the students to take some time with partners or in small groups to make a list in their *Student Guides* (in the Own It section) or on a piece of a paper with two columns. The first column can be beliefs they agree on about God and following Christ. The second column can be things either that they disagree about in their group or subjects they have disagreed about in the past with others who do not follow Christ.

How can being clear about your beliefs help you become closer to God?

How can thinking about ways you agree or disagree with others help you become closer to them?

Does getting angry about what you believe always make you a stronger Christian? Why or why not?

How can getting angry about your beliefs make it difficult for you to share Christ with others?

Allow students time to discuss the lists they have made and their answers to these questions.



ACT

Anger can lead us into some dark places, but it doesn't have to. God's anger can show us what He cares about most. As we read the Bible and discover what made God angry in the past, we can learn what that means for us today. We can also be thankful that our God does not stay angry with us forever and that—no matter who we are or what we've done—we can always come to God, and He will always accept us.

Here are some practical steps we can take to control anger and angry reactions to others when thinking about or talking about our beliefs:

- **Identify the beliefs we hold about Jesus.**
- **Discover what God has commanded Christ followers to do in the Bible and what rules people have made up on their own. Be clear in our minds about the differences.**

LEADERTIP

Allowing teens to listen to relevant songs during this exercise could help them to focus.

LEADERTIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

- **Think through the similarities and differences between ourselves and other believers, or between us and those who do not follow Christ.**
- **Recognize that all of us have sinned, all of us need God's mercy, and all of us can receive Jesus' love and forgiveness.**

Through doing the work of understanding these points, we can develop a deeper faith in God and a deeper understanding of His love for all people.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May all of us who were once far away from God draw near to Him through the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ, and may we let anger not divide us but rather guide us to greater faith in Him. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Life Skills

Anger Management

Releasing Anger

Quarter 3 Unit 3 Lesson 10

Genesis 4:1-16; Psalm 10

CONNECTION

We can release our anger toward God.



REMEMBER

*“Why, LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”*

Psalm 10:1



PREP

If you could ask God anything, what would it be? Would you ask Him how frogs can breathe through their skin? Or why the clouds always move? Or why He created ants? Would you ask how He placed the planets and stars in the sky? Or, would you ask Him why He loves you so much that He gave His only Son for you? From our human perspective, God is filled with mystery. His ways are awe-inspiring and completely beyond our comprehension.

But sometimes our questions about God lead us to anger instead of awe. Why does He allow babies to die? Why doesn't He stop genocide? Why does He give health to some and illness to others? Why has He allowed pain, disappointment, and struggles to cause chaos in my life? Why has He not answered my prayers?

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

2 small memo notebooks,
spiral-bound at the top
awards

LEADERTIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

When you feel your wonder giving way to anger, remember, as the psalmist did, that God is the helper of those who are helpless. And He is King forever and ever—always good, always in charge, and always worthy of our praise.

When we look around and see all the ways that God has given us happiness and help that we don't deserve and never could've imagined, we can begin to let go of our anger and praise Him for His mysterious ways—ways that are always for our good and His glory.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

Martin Luther is said to have commented about Psalm 10, saying that there isn't another psalm "which describes the mind, the manners, the works, the words, the feelings, and the fate of the ungodly with so much propriety, fullness, and light, as this Psalm." One of the most interesting aspects of this psalm, as is true of many psalms, is how accurately it portrays the feelings many of us experience at times when it seems like the good guys are just never winning, and the bad guys are getting all the breaks. But it also reminds us how often we see ourselves as the ones deserving God's help, and how seldom we think of ourselves as the ones who are doing wrong.

The story of Cain is a story of a young man who felt entitled to God's help and favor. He didn't see himself as the one in the wrong. And so, the anger that burned inside him was not just anger toward his brother but anger toward God. From our vantage point, we see how ridiculous Cain looks—feeling that the God who created justice is somehow being unjust and trying to hide his wickedness from the God who sees all. But we can also see ourselves in him—desiring and even expecting blessings when we've done nothing to deserve them. But God is good and just and patient with us, waiting as we sometimes discover that our anger with God is really anger with ourselves.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.



PREVIEW

You may want to use the U3L10 video from *Digital Resources* as students arrive to attract attention or spark discussion.

Before you start, write two different random phrases on the first page of each of the two small memo notebooks. You can write a saying such as “kill two birds with one stone,” “the early bird gets the worm,” or “don’t let the sun go down on your anger,” or any phrase you want (the phrase should make some kind of sense on its own).

Divide your group into two groups (or stay together if you have a very small group). Direct each group to sit in a straight line at a table or on the floor. Give writing utensils to each person. Let volunteers participate as needed to make the two groups even.

Instruct the students this way:

I have written a phrase in each of these notebooks. I will pass one notebook to each team. The first person on each team will read the phrase silently and turn the page so the rest of the group can’t see it. On the next blank page, they will draw an illustration of the phrase. Then, they will pass the notebook quickly to the next person in line.

That person will look only at the illustration drawn by the person before them. Then, they will turn the page and write a phrase down to match the illustration and pass the notebook to the next person. And the next person in line will read the phrase, turn the page, draw a picture of the phrase, and so on, until the notebooks reach the end of the lines.

At the end we’ll reveal the original phrase and each new version of it, letting people explain or defend their versions of the phrase.

If you have time, play the game again with new phrases. (An alternative version of this as a board game can be purchased from retail stores. That game is called *Telestrations*.)

After playing the game, ask the students to vote on these questions and give out small awards as you wish:

Who came the closest to writing or drawing the correct representation of the picture or phrase they saw?

Who created the most unusual drawing?

Who wrote the most unusual phrase?

LEADER TIP

It can be easy in this game for people to ridicule people’s drawing or spelling abilities and unintentionally cause hurt feelings. Make sure to set the standard at the beginning that the game is all in fun and meant to be silly, but that no one should make fun of any other person for their abilities.



CONNECT

LEADER TIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

LEADER TIP

Some of your students may have experienced injustice done to themselves or to people close to them. If teens have questions about their personal experiences, they may feel more comfortable sharing those in a more private setting. Look out for teens who are wrestling with their thoughts and make time to follow up with them. If many teens have tough questions, consider saving those questions for a panel discussion, such as the one suggested at the end of this unit.

In the game we just played, the further we got from the original phrase, the harder it was to figure out what to draw or write. And the further we got from the meaning of the original phrase, the harder it became to write or draw a phrase that made any sense.

The game is funny and confusing, but it can be kind of aggravating too. Some people find it so frustrating that they might get completely stumped or frozen and not write anything at all for a while. We struggle when we can't see the whole picture or have all the information clearly spelled out to us. And that struggle can make us irritated, even angry.

This is the same kind of anger that can rise up in us when bad things happen in our world and we don't understand why. When good things happen unexpectedly, we tend to consider them to be gifts of God or, some people might say, good fortune. We don't get too troubled about figuring out why those events happened to us or to our friends and family. But when bad things happen, we want to know why, what the cause was, and how to avoid these bad things ever happening again. We also often want someone to blame.

In situations like these, many times our reaction is to become angry with others—and especially with God. You may feel He has abandoned, rejected, or betrayed you. Anger toward God can be very confusing! It feels like an extra conflict inside of our hearts when we're already struggling. Today, we'll learn about how we can handle this particular anger.

Let's start by reading a story that might sound familiar to some of you. It's the story of two brothers, named Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve, the first family we read about in the Bible. We can find their story in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

Ask a student to read Genesis 4:2b-7:

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

In Old Testament times, God's people brought offerings to Him as a sign of worship. Bringing a gift to God was a way to show that a person loved God and put Him before all else.

Why do you think God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's?

What clues in these verses tell you something about Cain's offering?

What do God's words tell you about Cain's offering?

***The Bible doesn't say specifically why God accepted Abel's sacrifice and didn't accept Cain's. But the contrasting words in these verses, such as "some of the fruits" versus "fat portions from some of the firstborn," seem to indicate that Cain did not give the best of what he had to God. Perhaps he was saving the best for himself, or perhaps he just didn't feel the same obligation and duty that Abel did toward God. God's words also seem to reveal that Cain did something wrong: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"**

How would you explain the reasons for Cain's anger?

Who was he angry with?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Let's think about Cain's next steps. After hearing God's words, what are some things Cain could have done? What would you have done in his position? What do you think God might have wanted him to do?

Let's continue reading from Genesis 4:8-12.

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

How did Cain's anger toward God contribute to his decision to kill his brother?

Why do you think Cain transferred his anger to Abel?

Have you ever been angry or confused about bad things that happened to you, resulting in you taking that anger out on someone who didn't cause the bad things? What happened?

LEADER TIP

*If you choose to use small groups, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in their groups. Students can use the *Student Guide View* pages or the *Your View* cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

Because God loved Cain, He warned Cain not to let his anger cause him to sin. But Cain may have been too angry to listen—or maybe his heart wasn't open to what God wanted to tell him. Cain let his anger take control of his life.

****God is perfect. He is always right—even when we can't understand how what's happening can possibly be good. He is all-loving, all-wise, all-powerful, all-holy. We can always trust that He loves us and wants the best for us. But He also knows that we're human—and that we sometimes let our human emotions take control of our behavior. He knows that sometimes we don't understand the fear and pain that make us angry. But He will show us grace and mercy, and He will comfort us and give us peace.**

God showed mercy to Cain and did not take his life. Instead, he protected Cain from any who might seek to kill him.

EXPLORE

Instead of coming to God with his anger and confessing it, Cain acted out in anger against his brother, who, as far as we know, had done nothing wrong. But Cain could've taken a different path.

In the Psalms, we find several expressions of anger toward God. We find people who saw evil happening around them and wondered why. We find people who were confused about the way events were unfolding. Sometimes, it seemed like the bad guys were winning and the good guys were suffering.

Do those feelings sound familiar at all to you?

We all experience feelings of confusion and frustration at times. The world is a complicated place, and the perfect design God had created for us and for the world has been broken and marred by our sin. It's understandable to feel angry when innocent people get hurt or when we feel helpless. But God is big enough to handle our pain and confusion and anger. We can always go to Him.

We can express our anger in a lot of different ways. In the Bible, one way we see people expressing anger, frustration, or grief over suffering and guilt is by beating their chest. We're going to beat on the ground instead.

Invite the students to sit on the ground with you.

As we hear the words of Psalm 10, and as you feel comfortable, we can imagine feeling the frustration of injustice around us. Think about times when you felt the world just wasn't fair, or when it seemed as though God had abandoned you. As you listen to the words of the psalmist and think about your own situations and your own anger, you can pat the ground harder and faster.

LEADER TIP

Teens who have mobility issues may find it easier to beat against a wall or against a book or other hard surface. Check out Special Needs Solutions in *Digital Resources* for other ideas to be inclusive of those with different needs and abilities.

Project the words of Psalm 10 (a slide of the psalm is available on *Digital Resources*) or just read them slowly out loud from the Bible.

Silently tell God about your frustrations. Ask Him your questions.

*Why, LORD, do you stand far off?
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

*In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises.
He boasts about the cravings of his heart;
he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.
In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.
His ways are always prosperous;
your laws are rejected by him;
he sneers at all his enemies.
He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me."
He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."*

*His mouth is full of lies and threats;
trouble and evil are under his tongue.
He lies in wait near the villages;
from ambush he murders the innocent.
His eyes watch in secret for his victims;
like a lion in cover he lies in wait.
He lies in wait to catch the helpless;
he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.
His victims are crushed, they collapse;
they fall under his strength.
He says to himself, "God will never notice;
he covers his face and never sees."*

*Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God.
Do not forget the helpless.
Why does the wicked man revile God?
Why does he say to himself,
"He won't call me to account"?
But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.
Break the arm of the wicked man;
call the evildoer to account for his wickedness
that would not otherwise be found out.*

As you reach verse 16 of the psalm, pause and talk to the students:

As we reach the conclusion of the psalm, slow down and quiet your actions. Ask God for help to trust Him more. Ask Him to help you heal from your anger and to help you find peace.

Then read the last three verses of Psalm 10:

*The LORD is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror.*

ACT

As you go throughout your week, remember that God is big enough to handle your anger and pain. Go to Him when you feel life's not fair. Tell Him what you are feeling. Then listen for His voice in the words of good people around you, in the support of friends and family, and in the Bible.

Here are some other things you can do to help you express your anger toward God:

- **Read Psalm 10. Look up other psalms that express anger toward God and read those too (look in your *Student Guide* for ideas). Write about what you discover in those psalms.**
- **Write your own angry psalm. Think of all the questions you have for God and write those into a song for Him.**
- **Tell an adult you trust about what you are feeling. Ask that person to pray for you.**
- **Continue to read God's Word and learn more about Him.**

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *God, we know You are never hiding from us or standing far off, but that You are always right here—God right with us. God suffering right with us. God angry right with us. God frustrated right with us. Remind us that You are here with us this week. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

LEADERTIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Life Skills

Anger Management

Responding to Anger

Quarter 3 Unit 3 Lesson 11

Psalm 37; Proverbs 14:15, 16, 29; 15:1, 18; 22:24, 25

CONNECTION

We can respond to anger in healthy ways.



REMEMBER

“A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.”

Proverbs 15:18



PREP

You may be close to someone who is filled with rage—someone whose anger takes hold of you and causes fear, pain, and anger in your life. You may feel that the person’s angry choices determine your actions and emotions, squeezing out the joy and peace and leaving you powerless. Do you make excuses for the person who mistreats you? Do you struggle to hide the pain caused by the rage of others? Do you live in fear of the next explosion of angry words or physical abuse? Or do you lash back with anger of your own in order to regain control?

God knows your fear and pain. He knows the secrets you keep and the excuses you make. He knows about the temper you struggle to control. His love is more powerful than any human emotion. He can bring peace to your life if you put the situation in His hands. So when anger—either yours or someone else’s—threatens to overtake you, take a walk with God. Take a long walk. Give yourself time to cool

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

timer

LEADER TIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

off, time to see reason instead of rage. God can bring peace to your heart, and to your whole household.



LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

As we revisit some favorite and helpful verses from Proverbs in this lesson, recall that Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings. It's a book written with the purpose of making you slow down and think. And learning to slow down and be patient is exactly the kind of exercise we need in our lives in order to respond to anger in healthy ways.

It's no coincidence that angry words often come out more quickly. As anger builds, we often feel the need to get what we have to say off our chests as fast as we can, before anyone can stop us. We snap out retorts, not because we're in a hurry to get somewhere, but because we're running away from something—whether that be silence, truth, responsibility, or something else we don't want to deal with.

Reading a book like Proverbs requires us to pause to understand the meaning of the words, to look up definitions and cultural references, to talk and think about what the author meant. And as we think about these proverbs, we also think about what the Author of our lives wants us to learn from them. These practices cannot be done well in a hurry. And as we take time, patiently uncovering the meaning in the words, we also discover the benefits of patience and peace.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.



PREVIEW

You may want to use the U3L11 video from *Digital Resources* either before or after the activity to attract attention or spark discussion. Once all students have arrived, introduce the activity.

We've been talking about anger and managing anger, and one of the best ways to defuse a tense or heated argument is to use humor. We're going to play a game called "Don't Smile" to see how humor can be a winning strategy.

Divide the group into pairs. Then tell them to sit opposite each other, facing one another. Each round of the game will take 30 seconds. In those 30 seconds, each member of the pair will try to make the other person laugh or just smile. But here are the rules:

- They may say anything, as long as they keep their language appropriate.
- No touching.
- No spitting or blowing in the other person's face.
- No closing eyes.
- No looking away or moving away from the other person.
- No silent treatment—each person must speak during the 30 seconds.

Volunteers or students who don't wish to be participants can act as judges. The first person in each pair to smile will be out of the game and can join the judges. The person who wins the round advances to the next round and has to find a new partner. If any pairs "tie," that is, either no one smiles or they both smile at the same time in the 30 seconds, both members of the pair advance, but they still must find new partners. The game continues until only one pair is left. That pair will then have 60 seconds to discover who is the champion—which will be either the person most skilled at making others smile or the person most determined not to smile.

After the champion is declared, ask the group these questions:

Which was harder for you—making someone else smile or stopping yourself from smiling?

What was a tactic that worked well for you in the game?

How was patience a factor in the game?

CONNECT

We've seen in a previous lesson how anger is like a cup that is filled to the top. When someone is angry, those emotions can spill out onto others. Sometimes their emotions may come from irritation or frustration. But often anger is linked to other feelings like fear, insecurity, and pain. Sometimes people get angry to make themselves feel better about the bad things happening in their lives. And sometimes they get angry to avoid dealing with other problems.

Some people don't know how to control their anger.

Don't mention any names, but raise your hand if you have someone in your life who has a lot of anger.

LEADER TIP

The three situations discussed in Connect are also provided as PowerPoint slides on *Digital Resources* and can be projected or printed out.

Many of us spend time around angry people. Today, we'll talk about some strategies for what to do or not do when we are with an angry person.

Break the group into small groups to think through the following situations. You may want to assign each group a situation to discuss. Or, let them discuss all three situations.

*After each situation is read, instruct the groups to answer these questions:

How did you respond to the angry person in this situation?

How effective was that response?

What other things could you have done to help?

Situation 1: Eva's dad died recently. Before her dad died, she was a good student and never had behavior problems at school. But since her father's death, Eva has been angry a lot and seems to yell for no reason. She pushes others around and doesn't show respect for her teachers. She's rude and sarcastic. You avoid talking to her because she gets irritated so easily. When she does yell at you, you shout back at her and tell her to chill. You and other friends have started to exclude Eva when you go out together because it's just easier that way.

Situation 2: Nico's parents are alcoholics. Whenever they drink, they argue and beat Nico. Because they spend their money on alcohol, Nico must work to help feed his family. He seems angry all the time. He often has headaches from holding in his anger. He's usually hungry, so you often share your lunch with him. You know he's hurting and in trouble. But even though you are kind to him, sometimes he explodes over small problems. When he gets angry, you give Nico time to calm down. You pray for him and try to help him when you can. You forgive him for his anger and let him know you care about him. Even though he sometimes gets angry with you, Nico tells you that you're his only friend and the only person who understands.

Situation 3: Amie is a high-maintenance friend of yours who has always been an overachiever. She's always been stressed about getting the best grades and getting into the top schools. She's involved in so many activities and clubs at school, you can't imagine how she keeps up with all of it. But as you all get closer to graduation, she seems to get meaner. She talks trash about other students behind their backs and lashes out at you for making even the slightest criticism about her attitude or behavior. You are confused about why Amie seems so angry at everyone around her, and you try to talk to her about it, but she just shuts you out and ends up blocking you on her phone. You think about talking to her parents but decide to just shrug it off. If she wants to be that way, then fine, let her be that way. Besides, with all the clubs she's in, she has plenty of other friends.

LEADER TIP

*If you choose to use small groups, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in their groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the Your View cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

LEADER TIP

Remember that some of the situations being described may hit close to home for some students. Be on the lookout for any students who seem emotionally affected by this lesson. Use the What to Do If You See Abuse tool from *Digital Resources* to help identify and work with students who are in difficult situations.

LEADERTIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

ZOOM QUESTIONS

As students discuss the questions for each situation, they could also deal with these questions: If Jesus had known this person, what do you think He would have done? What would He want you to do? At what point do you know when to get adult help for a person who seems to be in trouble?

Let the groups have time to discuss the situations and then allow one person from each group to share their answers. Conclude the discussion by asking students to read the following verses from the book of Proverbs:

*The simple believe anything,
but the prudent give thought to their steps.
The wise fear the LORD and shun evil,
but a fool is hotheaded and yet feels secure. (14:15, 16)*

*Whoever is patient has great understanding,
but one who is quick-tempered displays folly. (14:29)*

*A gentle answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (15:1)*

*A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict,
but the one who is patient calms a quarrel. (15:18)*

*Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person,
do not associate with one easily angered,
or you may learn their ways
and get yourself ensnared. (22:24, 25)*

What words and themes do you hear repeated in these verses?

What is the wisdom in having patience when dealing with an angry person?

How is foolishness linked with having a hot temper?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Sometimes patience is confused with inaction. How would you describe the difference between the two? In what ways can learning patience help both angry people and the people around them? Are there any situations in which patience might not be helpful?

****The last verses we read said not to become friends with a hot-tempered person. But the meaning there, as we read verse 25, seems to suggest that the danger exists mostly for someone who finds himself easily influenced by those around him. No doubt it's generally good advice to stay out of the path of hot-tempered people, but even angry people need friends. In fact, sometimes angry people are**

the ones most in need of true friends—people who can help them talk about what they're really feeling and guide them to get more help when they need it. But it's also important never to put yourself in a situation in which you are being verbally or physically abused. If anyone is in a situation like that now, please come talk to me or one of the other leaders at the end of class. We'll take care of you and make sure you are safe.

We've seen in these verses and in the situations we discussed together that patience and understanding are the keys to dealing with and responding to anger. But how do you practice being patient in those situations? How do you learn how to be patient when you feel anger rising up in you—or when you see it getting ready to explode out of someone else?

What helps you to be patient when you are in a stressful situation?

What helps you use kind words instead of angry words?

Here are some things you can do to help you remember to be patient:

- **Remember God's Word.** Memorize verses such as Proverbs 15:1 or 18.
- **Pray.** Before you open your mouth to respond, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you have the right words to say.
- **Observe.** Look at people who are angry and think about what they're dealing with. There is always a reason for the anger. Try to understand what they might be feeling.
- **Ask.** Instead of responding angrily or defensively, ask a question such as, "What can I do to help you right now?"

We mentioned earlier that sometimes humor can be used in tense situations. When you are very familiar with a person, sometimes it works to use humor to help them see the ridiculousness of their actions or to help them not take things too seriously. But humor used at the wrong time or by the wrong person might cause hurt feelings or tempers to flare even more. Let's think about some other ways to respond to angry people that might not be so helpful.

What do you think would be the least helpful way to respond to an angry person?

Think about a time you were involved with a person in an angry situation and the situation went from bad to worse. What happened that made things worse?

Here are some other ideas about what to avoid when responding to an angry person:

- **Playing counselor.** Sometimes telling a person you know why she is angry or trying to calm her can backfire. She might see you as claiming to be in control of the situation and reject that.
- **Getting physical.** Don't touch an angry person unless you know him very well or unless the person has invited you to do so or given you permission. While mutual hugs can make an angry situation better, a hug or touch forced on a person can result in someone getting pushed away and possibly hurt.
- **Getting emotional.** It can be difficult to control your own emotional responses around an angry person, but crying or yelling will often result in a less productive outcome. The angry person might see any emotional response as a form of manipulation.
- **Being dishonest.** Don't accept blame for things you haven't done. Even if doing so might seem to calm an angry person in the moment, it can cause problems later, and it isn't being honest. In the same way, don't make promises you don't intend to keep just to calm a person down. This is another form of dishonesty.
- **Devaluing yourself.** Refuse to remain in a situation in which you are being insulted or physically hurt. Go to a safe place or call for help.

When you frequently spend time with an angry person, it can affect you in many different ways. It can make you react in anger too. It can also cause low self-worth, anxiety, depression, and fear. Spending time with angry people can also make it difficult to form trusting relationships. But God can help you overcome these issues, even if you are in a difficult relationship with an angry person.



EXPLORE

Even when you use the ideas we talked about, dealing with someone who's angry is difficult. But you don't have to do it alone. When you need to deal with an angry person in your life, you can ask God for help. He will walk with you in your difficult times.

We've already seen how there are many psalms that express human feelings. The psalmists felt comfortable coming to God with these emotions, and we can feel comfortable doing that too. God is an ever-present friend, but He's better than any other friend because He has the power and the wisdom and the authority to actually help us find solutions to our problems.

Psalm 37 starts out with the words, "Do not fret," and that phrase could be considered the theme of the whole song. We'll take turns reading through some of the verses in this psalm. Later, you can read the whole psalm on your own and reflect on it in your *Student Guides*. As we read these verses, use your *Student Guides* to

- jot down any phrases that would help you stay calm in angry situations
- jot down the promises mentioned in the psalm that God offers
- find the answer to this question: **What will come to those who seek peace?**

*“Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;
for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.”*

Psalm 37:1, 2

*“Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.”*

vv. 5, 6

*“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.
For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.”*

vv. 8, 9

*“Consider the blameless, observe the upright;
a future awaits those who seek peace.
But all sinners will be destroyed;
there will be no future for the wicked.
The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD;
he is their stronghold in time of trouble.
The LORD helps them and delivers them;
he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.”*

vv. 37-40

ACT

At the beginning of the lesson, I asked you to raise your hand if you had an angry person in your life. If you raised your hand, or if you have ever encountered an angry person, think about the things we’ve been talking about. Think about the wisdom we read in Proverbs. Think about how the psalmist expressed thoughts to God. And think about things you can do or avoid in order to make interactions with angry people go better.

What’s one word, phrase, or action that stands out to you as something you could try the next time you’re with an angry person?

How do you think that word, phrase, or action might help you? How might it help the angry person?

LEADER TIP

Allowing teens to listen to relevant songs during this exercise could help them to focus.

LEADERTIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Write that word, phrase, or action down in your *Student Guide*. If you encounter an angry person this week, remember to think about God's Word and to pray. Ask God to help you be patient, kind, and understanding, and to respond wisely and confidently when someone gets angry. Remember that God will be with you always, and He's especially there for you in your most tense situations.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May God help you to be slow to anger and quick to understand. May your patience be a blessing to all who are around you and bring glory to God. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

Be aware that conversations with teens in difficult situations may result in finding out about instances of abuse or neglect. Know your legal reporting responsibility—check out What to Do If You See Abuse in the Tools folder of *Digital Resources*.

Life Skills

Anger Management

Managing Anger in Healthy Ways

Quarter 3 Unit 3 Lesson 12

Ephesians 4:25-32; James 1:19-21

CONNECTION

We can manage anger in healthy ways.



REMEMBER

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

James 1:19, 20



PREP

It should be clear to us by now that our anger doesn't surprise God. He knows we'll get angry. He talks about it in the Bible. Anger can cause us to sin. But anger can also help us, if we don't allow it to get out of control.

God knows we'll get angry, but He cautions us to not let anger rule us. He asks us to share our anger with Him instead. Is there something that has happened in your life that's left a scar of anger and bitterness on your heart? Do you sometimes struggle with the pain and grief that come from unresolved anger? If so, there is One who understands. He wants to hear your hurts and help you overcome your anger. He can give you His loving comfort and His wisdom to see the truth of the situation. Take time to go to Him with your anger and pain now.

SUPPLIES

Digital Resources

Student Guides

Bibles

pens, pencils

a potato (scrubbed clean)

panel participants

slips of paper

bag

LEADERTIP

A graphic of the Remember verse is provided in *Digital Resources* for every session, along with other resources, including a PowerPoint template for you to customize to help lead the session time.

LEADERTIP

As you have been working through these lessons on managing anger, you may have noticed some students who have more difficulty controlling anger than others. Or maybe they control it in the ministry setting, but you hear of problems in other areas of their lives. Realize that there can be all kinds of reasons teens may act out in anger. Check out the resource article in this unit and the Special Needs Solutions tool in *Digital Resources* for more information.

NOTE: A week or more before this lesson, ask several people you trust to be on an Anger Management panel discussion and give them a copy of your lesson materials for this unit. You may want to ask people such as elders in your congregation or counselors and coaches in the community. Either at the start of this lesson or in the weeks prior to this lesson, ask teens to write down on slips of paper the questions they have related to the subject of managing anger. Give these questions to the panel participants so they have a little time to think about their answers. Put the slips of paper into a bag so you can draw them out at random later. The panel discussion will take place during the Explore section of the lesson.

LEADER'S BIBLE NOTES

The letters of the New Testament were written to Christians in the early stages of the formation of the church. There were many issues that they were working out, and many of the believers wouldn't have been around or near when Jesus was walking on the earth. They depended on those who had been close to Jesus to tell them about His words and His instructions for how to live a godly life. That's why these letters are so full of practical advice and helpful directions and encouragement, or exhortations and corrections, depending on the situation.

It may be helpful to point out to your teens that even though these letters were written a couple thousand years ago, the people they were addressed to shared some important characteristics with your students. Namely, they were fairly young in terms of their life of faith in Christ, and they were struggling to understand what Jesus' words meant for them. They had a lot of different cultural and societal pressures on them and were trying to navigate those, all while being faithful examples to others. They sometimes were confused about what things were the highest priorities, and they got caught up in arguments about matters of little significance. They made mistakes often and had to be corrected by those who were older and wiser than them. (Your teens might not like to hear that last one, but it's true!)

As we read these letters from Paul and James, we don't have to reach too far to imagine ourselves in the sandals of the first-century Christians, trying hard to listen and understand the life Jesus wants them to lead.

OVERVIEW

Preview: Give a glimpse of today's Connection point.

Connect: Analyze what the Bible says.

Explore: Hear what students have to say.

Act: Give students something to do.


PREVIEW

You may want to use the U3L12 video from *Digital Resources* as students arrive to attract attention or spark discussion. Let them know that this is the last lesson in the series on anger management and that today's lesson will include a special panel to answer any questions they have about being angry with God, handling their own anger, when it's right to be angry and when it isn't, responding to other people's anger, and so forth. Let students write on slips of paper any questions they have for the panel. (Relay these questions ahead of time to the panel participants and then put the slips of paper into a bag to use later.)

Direct the teens to form a circle, and show them the potato you have. Tell them you are going to play a game of "Hot Potato," with an actual potato, of course. (You can warm the potato in a microwave beforehand, if you wish, but don't let it get too hot!) In this game, the idea is to keep the potato going around the circle as fast as you can, because no one wants to get caught holding the potato. But in order to pass the potato to the next person in the circle, you have to name something that makes you a little warm with anger.

During this first round, for example, people might list pet peeves like getting stuck behind slow drivers or breaking their last good pencil. But after one round around the circle has been completed, stop and ask the students to make one more round with the hot potato. But this time, they should name something that makes a person really fired up—steaming hot with anger!

The only rules are these:

- The potato must stay in motion, so if you have trouble thinking of an answer, toss the potato from one of your hands to another until you think of an answer.
- You cannot pass the potato on to another person until you give an answer.
- You cannot repeat any answer.

If students get stuck on an answer, leaders may help them think of ideas. The game is over once the potato has made it around the circle twice.

After the activity, ask these questions:

What are some common sources of anger that were named?

In which of these situations is anger an appropriate response?

In which of these situations is anger *not* a helpful response?

LEADER TIP

Remember to check out the Special Needs Solutions tool in *Digital Resources* to help you include those who may have different abilities.



CONNECT

LEADERTIP

Encourage students to bring their Bibles or to use Bible apps on their phones. Excerpts of the Scripture with each lesson are also provided in the *Student Guides*.

We often respond with anger to things we think are wrong. Anger that is motivated by pride can be hurtful to you and to others. This type of unhealthy anger is all about “me,” my rights, and my concerns.

Unhealthy or prideful anger might cause you to yell at a store owner who wrongly accused you of stealing, or it might cause you to honk your horn and shout curses at an unsuspecting driver who accidentally cut you off. This type of anger causes you to make poor choices and spread your negativity to other people. It prevents you from making good decisions and thinking carefully.

Anger that stems from pride or selfish desires can prevent you from experiencing joy, even about things that should make you happy. It can also affect your health, causing headaches, anxiety, stomach issues, and other physical problems. Unhealthy anger pushes other people away instead of allowing them to understand you and help you. This unhealthy anger needs to be controlled so it doesn't keep you from doing things you want and need to do.

Which of the situations we shared in our game could be the result of unhealthy, prideful anger?

Which of the situations we mentioned could be the result of righteous, godly anger?

Anger is an understandable way to react to injustice or deep pain. For example, it's right to feel angry about violence against innocent people or the fact that a family doesn't have enough to eat. Anger and sorrow are normal, healthy responses to finding out that a loved one has been diagnosed with a terrible disease or that someone has stolen money from you or your family. When something bad happens in your life that shouldn't have happened, it's normal to feel angry about it—in fact, sometimes this type of anger can be healthy.

In what ways do you think this type of anger could be healthy?

This type of anger can help us to solve problems and motivate us to act. Healthy anger is not sinful. It can help us to defend others who are being mistreated or to recognize that we are being mistreated and do something to protect ourselves. It can also show us when we have done something wrong. It can help us to see our needs or recognize what's important to us. Jesus experienced healthy, righteous anger when He saw people disrespecting God's temple. He used His anger to change their behavior. We can also use this kind of anger for good, if we learn to control it. Even when anger is healthy, the expression of it can still come out in nonproductive or hurtful ways.

What are some ways we might express anger that would be hurtful to ourselves or others?

What are some ways we could express anger that might actually be helpful to others?

God’s anger is righteous and healthy. Righteous anger is God’s response to sin. It’s about His concerns and His kingdom, and it’s expressed in ways that are consistent with His character. For example, God’s righteous anger will not cause Him to lose control of Himself. God gets angry with those who cause harm to those He loves—and that includes you!

***Even though we are sometimes justified in our anger, we cannot let our anger take control of our lives. Let’s read from what James wrote in his letter to the twelve tribes—the Israelites or Jewish Christians—scattered among different countries in 1:19-21:**

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Does this passage of Scripture say anger is wrong?

What is it about human anger that does not produce righteousness (hint: look at the first part of this sentence and think about the opposite of those three actions)?

What does James say we need to get rid of?

What should we accept instead?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

What connection would “all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent” have to anger that produces sinful reactions? How can God’s Word save us? How can God’s Word help us to not sin in anger?

Now let’s turn back to Ephesians, to Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus. In Ephesians 4, Paul gives the believers some straightforward instructions on how to live as Christ followers. He tells them to not get stuck in their old ways but to put on the “new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (v. 24).

LEADER TIP

*If you choose to use small groups, pause before the marked paragraph and allow students to lead this portion of the teaching in their groups. Students can use the *Student Guide* View pages or the Your View cards as provided in *Digital Resources*. If you use this option, skip forward to the starred paragraph (***) after the small group time concludes.

Ask someone to read vv. 25-32:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

How are falsehoods and untruths sometimes related to anger or unhealthy expressions of anger?

How is unwholesome talk related to anger?

Paul says to "get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." What connections do these negative things have to anger?

What does Paul contrast these negative feelings with?

ZOOM QUESTIONS

Paul says not to sin in anger. From the rest of the passage, what kind of list would you make of specific ways that anger can lead to sinful behavior? Paul also tells us not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God." From the rest of this passage, what behavior do you think he means that would grieve the Holy Spirit? How does that behavior contrast with the idea of putting on a new self that is meant to be like God? How does it make you feel to know that you may have grieved the Holy Spirit with your actions?

****No matter what reasons we have for our anger, we need to learn to control it. Proudful, unhealthy anger that's out of control can cause us to hurt ourselves and others. Healthy anger that's not controlled doesn't allow us to improve a harmful or unjust situation. In the Act section, we'll talk about some practical steps to take to manage anger.**



EXPLORE

For this Explore section, you will facilitate a panel discussion on the subject of Anger Management. Invite the participants you have previously asked to be part of the panel to come forward and let them sit in front of the students, facing them. You will take the questions you have collected from the students and pull them out of the bag one at a time, read the question, then ask one or more of the panelists to respond. Try to keep the discussion going so that several of the questions get answered. Also try to make sure all of the panelists have a chance to speak at some point during the discussion. You may decide to allow students to ask follow-up questions during the discussion.

When your allotted time is finished, thank the panelists and invite one of them to pray for the students.



ACT

By now you probably realize that it's important to learn to control your anger in healthy ways. Here are some things you can do when you begin to feel your anger boiling over.

- **Take deep breaths. Breathe in for 4 counts, hold your breath for 7 counts, and exhale slowly for 8 counts. Deep breathing lowers your blood pressure and helps you to calm down. It gives you a chance to think before you speak. Most importantly, it gives you a chance to talk to God about your anger.**
- **Excuse yourself and move away from the situation or person causing your anger. Putting physical distance between you and the person or situation causing your anger will give you time to become calmer. It will give you an opportunity to think about the effect your words, your actions, and your anger will have on the other person. It will also give you a chance to share your anger with God, the One who comforts and brings peace.**
- **Communicate. Talk about your anger with a friend or a trusted adult—someone you can share your feelings with freely. If it is safe, you can try to talk with the person who made you angry. Try using “I messages.” Remember to use this form: “I feel _____ when you _____ because I _____.” For example, “I feel frustrated when you talk while I am talking because I cannot share my thoughts.”**

As you use these techniques and calming methods and talk about the problem, you may see more clearly what the truths of the situation are—or you may discover a solution with the other person.

LEADER TIP

Be sure your students understand that they should never confront someone, even with righteous anger, when it might be dangerous to them or to others. In situations where violence can result, they should speak with a trusted adult who can give them wise counsel about how to handle the situation.

LEADERTIP

An important part of deepening your relationships with your students is ending your class time by praying over them. We've provided biblically based statements you can use as prayers, or you may want to create your own to remind teens of who God is, what He wants for them, and how to connect with Him.

Jesus is the kind of trusted friend you can always talk to. When you are angry, you can always tell Him. He can give you the wisdom and love to conquer even the situations that make you the angriest.

Before you go out this week, let me pray for you: *May God help us all to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. God, remind us of the righteousness You desire. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Reminders for you: In the *Student Guide* are suggestions for verses for further study. Remind students that they can contact you during the week if questions come up about anything they heard today. If students express interest in making a commitment to follow Christ, see the Salvation Path tool in *Digital Resources* to guide them through this decision concerning repentance and baptism.

In *Digital Resources* you'll find Family Connection tools and Student Connection helps for reaching out to your students during the week as well. Remember to let students know that you (or other leaders) are available to speak to them or to their family members if they need more information or would like you to pray with or for them.

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Helping Teens with Anger Management

Unit 3 Resource Article

It's important to note that everyone is likely to experience a higher volume of emotions at this time of the world. Many students are still mourning the loss of events (sports, school dances, family vacations, etc.). Some may be grieving the loss of a loved one. Their routines and daily lives may be very different from before the pandemic hit.

It's important to make sure teens know that, no matter what's going on in the world around them, they are seen, heard, and valued. Offering a compassionate and listening ear will be a blessing to the teens you serve.

What Is Anger?

The Mayo Clinic defines anger as the body's response to perceived threats. Anger prepares the body to respond and protect itself against these threatening factors. For example, an environment that a teen perceives to be physically threatening, such as an abusive relationship, can trigger anger. Emotionally vulnerable situations can also trigger anger, such as a teen being cyber-bullied.

However, teens' perceived threats may or may not be actual threats. Regardless of whether the trigger is actually a threat, though, teens can respond in anger. Adolescence can be a confusing time, full of changes and emotions. Many teens cannot identify and verbally express their specific emotions. This can lead to feelings of anger and frustration. Difficult situations or relationships can also lead to anger.

Anger is a strong feeling, but it's not the teen's first feeling when something irritating happens. Anger usually comes after feeling hurt, frustrated, jealous, or sad—all feelings that are painful to experience. For example, if a teen feels criticized during a conversation, she may get up and stomp out of the room to show anger. However, her first feeling was probably frustration or pain. Or, perhaps a teen stops engaging and becomes withdrawn in a group because he was hurt by something another teen

said. While it is impossible to know every trigger that may cause teens to feel angry, it is possible to help them practice self-awareness and anger management skills when the need arises.

What Happens in the Body When a Teen Feels Angry?

The heart rate increases, and blood pressure goes up. The person's muscles become tense and prepared to fight! When a teen is at this point, thinking clearly is not possible. When very angry, no one is able to listen well or speak wisely. This is not the time to tell teens about the consequences of their anger. This will only make them angrier.

It's normal to feel angry. But sometimes anger can become hurtful. That happens when teens don't know what to do when they feel angry. They need to learn to manage their anger.

How Do You Teach Anger Management?

Build Healthy Relationships

When teens feel safe, they're calmer and more likely to accept your help. This is the time to talk about anger—not when they are furious about something.

What does it look like to build healthy relationships? How can you build a relationship with a teen who refuses to talk much and doesn't want to participate

in things? Here are some key elements for building and modeling healthy relationships with teens.

Communication. Although this is the foundation of all healthy relationships, it is especially important with adolescents. Communicate clearly and regularly about ministry activities and keep them updated when changes occur. It is also helpful to check in regularly to see if teens have prayer requests—and to follow up in later days and weeks about those prayer requests. Through seeing good communication modeled, not only can teens feel more secure, but they can also learn to practice this in their own relationships.

Empathy. Listen when teens talk or need to share something with you. Express empathy for their situations and emotions. Rather than trying to fix their situations, focus on being an empathetic listener and pointing them to the God who is bigger than their situations. As you consistently model empathy, you can also begin encouraging teens to practice empathy in their own lives and situations.

Boundaries. Setting boundaries not only helps teens learn to respect limits set by others, but it can also help them learn to set healthy boundaries in their own relationships. Setting boundaries can be as simple as communicating when you are and are not available to answer a call or a text—then sticking to those times.

Although this is certainly not an exhaustive list, practicing communication, empathy, and setting boundaries can help to build and model healthy relationships with teens. Building healthy relationships will create a sense of security, which can also reduce anger triggers for teens.

Think Prevention

Develop consistent routines, structure, and responses for teens so they know what to expect. Prevent situations that can make people angry. This can often be done with an environmental change.

Consider the following factors as you think about preventing stressful situations.

Set clear expectations. Set boundaries, expectations, and standards of behavior for your teens, and set them slightly higher than you expect most teens to meet. Teens will want to rise to the level you set. But remember to have grace and patience as they learn to meet those expectations.

Consider teens with special needs. Teens with different physical, behavioral, or mental health needs (such as autism, PTSD, anxiety, or depression), can respond with rage or anger when they feel confused, frightened, or are simply overstimulated. The rage in these cases may not be based on angry feelings at all but may instead be a physical response to a neurological disconnect or a chemical imbalance. Giving teens a safe, calm space to take breaks from stimuli and process their thoughts can be helpful. Teens may also need very clear instructions to feel secure. Give specific instructions and get confirmation that teens hear and understand you. Recognize that such confirmation may come through eye contact or through verbal or written responses, depending on the teen's abilities.

Prepare teens for disappointments and changes in situations. For example, if you usually allow some teens to stay online after a digital meeting to talk with you, tell them when you'll be busy and have to leave earlier. Let them know about the change ahead of time. This can help them to be prepared, rather than having the surprise shift trigger an angry or hurt reaction. Or perhaps you have a teen who has difficulty with transitioning between activities. If the activities will have a different format one week, give that person as much notice as you can, and allow several minutes to transition between activities. You could try implementing a familiar song, sound effect, or video clip as a visual and auditory transition cue as well, and keep this transition cue the same week to week. Preparing teens in these ways can

While it is impossible to know every trigger that may cause teens to feel angry, it is possible to help them practice self-awareness and anger management skills when the need arises.

help them to feel secure, rather than being caught off guard and feeling frustrated or confused by the changes.

Assume the best about your teens. It's important not to assume a teen is acting out in anger or having bad behavior for no reason. There's almost always an underlying reason, especially with kids who are under stress or who have been through trauma.

Teach New Skills

Teach teens to name different emotions. Not every negative emotion is anger. If they can name what they're feeling, they'll be more equipped to deal with it. If the teen says, "I'm disappointed because I did not get to visit my grandma this summer," this is much better than stomping around and saying angry things. Help teens to learn to think about and talk about their feelings with this formula: "When X happens, I feel Y," instead of accusing others or blaming others for how they feel.

Teach teens relaxation skills. This can include deep breathing, prayer, meditating on God's Word, and muscle-relaxation techniques. Help them identify a place where they can go to calm down. Encourage them to do calming activities, such as reading, drawing, singing, and praying.

Teach teens steps to take when they are angry. Help teens to come up with their own anger management plans for what they will do when they sense angry feelings starting to arise and when a tense situation is developing. For example, their plan might look something like this:

1. Pause. Count to five.
2. Take three deep breaths.
3. Sing my favorite song in my head.
4. Walk away.
5. Tell a friend or leader how I'm feeling.

Teach problem-solving to teens. Encourage them to answer two questions when they're angry:

- What is the problem?
- What are some solutions to this problem?

In time, teens will learn to identify why they're angry and what they can do about it.

Change won't happen immediately. Practice and model these strategies consistently. Anger management is a skill that has to be learned, but practice makes perfect.

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LEADER'S THOUGHTS

What are your plans and prayers for this quarter? Use this space to jot down ideas about events, small groups, service projects, or any other way in which your teens can CONNECT with their community and peers, with the church, and with God.

connect

YEAR 1 // QUARTER 3

Unit / Lesson	Unit Title and Focus	Lesson Title	Bible Basis	Connection	Remember Verse
U1/L1	WHO IS JESUS? (Spiritual Growth)	Our Messiah	Isaiah 9:1, 2, 6, 7; Matthew 4:12-17	Jesus is our Messiah who fulfills God's promises.	Isaiah 9:6b
U1/L2	WHO IS JESUS? (Spiritual Growth)	Our Friend	Hebrews 2:10-18; 4:14-16	Jesus is our friend who understands us.	Hebrews 4:15
U1/L3	WHO IS JESUS? (Spiritual Growth)	Our King	Matthew 21:1-17	Jesus is our King who leads us.	Philippians 2:10
U1/L4	WHO IS JESUS? (Spiritual Growth)	Our Answer	Acts 5:17-42; 1 Peter 3:13-17	Jesus is the answer we can share with others.	1 Peter 3:15
U2/L5	FORGIVENESS (Character Development)	Forgiveness Brings Freedom	Psalm 103:9-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19; Ephesians 1:3-10; 1 John 1:5-10	God's forgiveness brings us freedom from sin and shame.	1 John 1:9
U2/L6	FORGIVENESS (Character Development)	Forgiveness Brings Relief	Psalm 34:17, 18; Matthew 11:28-30; Galatians 6:1-6	Forgiving others relieves us from pain, anger, and bitterness.	Ephesians 4:32
U2/L7	FORGIVENESS (Character Development)	Forgiveness Brings Restoration	Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 7:8-13; 13:9-11	Asking for forgiveness helps restore relationships.	2 Corinthians 13:11
U2/L8	FORGIVENESS (Character Development)	Forgiveness Changes Lives	Genesis 50:15-21; Luke 5:17-26; Acts 2:37-47; Romans 12:1, 2	God's forgiveness can bring extraordinary change.	Acts 2:38
U3/L9	ANGER MANAGEMENT (Life Skills)	Faith Through Anger	Isaiah 64:8-9; Ephesians 2	God can lead us through anger to deeper faith.	Ephesians 2:13
U3/L10	ANGER MANAGEMENT (Life Skills)	Releasing Anger	Genesis 4:1-16; Psalm 10	We can release our anger toward God.	Psalms 10:1
U3/L11	ANGER MANAGEMENT (Life Skills)	Responding to Anger	Psalm 37; Proverbs 14:15, 16, 29; 15:1, 18; 22:24, 25	We can respond to anger in healthy ways.	Proverbs 15:18
U3/L12	ANGER MANAGEMENT (Life Skills)	Managing Anger in Healthy Ways	Ephesians 4:25-32; James 1:19-21	We can manage anger in healthy ways.	James 1:19, 20

EVENTS OF JESUS' LIFE

The events of Jesus' life are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are the first four books of the New Testament. His ascension and the ministries of His followers after that are found in the next book, called Acts.

Reading any one of the Gospels will help you learn about Jesus, but reading through all four will provide more context and different perspectives.



The Messiah is prophesied
(Isaiah 9).



Jesus is born
in Bethlehem
(Luke 2).



Jesus begins
His public ministry
(Luke 4).



Jesus grows up
in Nazareth
(Matthew 2).



Jesus' family flees
to Egypt
(Matthew 2).



Jesus reveals Himself
as the Messiah
(John 7).



Jesus rides into
Jerusalem on a donkey
(Matthew 21).



Jesus ascends
into Heaven
(Acts 1).



Jesus is raised
from the dead
and appears
to disciples
(Luke 24).



Jesus dies on the
cross for our sins
(Luke 23).



Jesus sends the
Holy Spirit
(Acts 2).



Jesus will come again
(Revelation 19).

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