



## **BIBLE CLASS**

**YEAR 4**

**LESSONS 21 – 40**

## Lesson 21

## MISSION SCENE

**Aim:** To show that every Christian is called to be a missionary

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask your students what job they think that every Christian is given to do. You may get a wide variety of answers. Some may be practical – e.g. reading the Bible and praying. Some may be ethical – e.g. leading a good life. Try to encourage someone to suggest telling others about the Lord Jesus.

1. Being a missionary is an act of obedience. Jesus tells his people to spread the Gospel. (Matt. 28:16-20. Discuss whether obedience is optional or all-inclusive in terms of missionary service.
2. Everything we learn about the Lord and about his Word, whether from parents, church, Sunday School or Bible Class is part of our missionary training. Only a very small proportion of Christians need to go to missionary training college, normally those who are going to work in very specific areas. Eg youth work in this country, work among ethnic communities, work in a totally different culture overseas.
3. The qualification for missionary work is being a Christian, not being a graduate of a missionary training college.
4. Being a missionary should be a way of life of every Christian. It can be tempting for young Christians to hang around together to the exclusion of non-Christian friends. That makes missionary work among friends very difficult. The opposite temptation also has to be watched. Spending too much spare time with non-Christians can take the edge of our faith. We can become used to different standards, even in things like speech.
5. Either give the young people their worksheets to go through individually or leave them to discuss the answers as a group or guide the discussion. You know your students best and what works for them.
6. Allow them plenty of time to think of their own questions as they do the second side of the worksheet. If they ask any questions that you need time to think about, tell them that and answer them next week. Young people respect that kind of honesty.
7. Leave time at the end of the class to encourage them to share whether they have asked the Lord to be their Saviour. If some, or all, are not believers, encourage them to give this serious thought. The lessons that follow will allow them to do that.

**Activities:** Complete worksheets.

## CHRISTIAN LIFE

### Lesson 22

### Conversion – 3,000 at Pentecost Acts 2:22-47

**Aim:** To identify the results of conversion.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk if they know of anyone who was recently converted.

1. The Christian life has a beginning. Jesus taught Nicodemus that he “must be born again” (John 3:7) Throughout the ages the church has grown as people’s lives have been changed. On average, in any local fellowship, there are a few such conversions in a year, but there are times when something extraordinary happens. At Pentecost three thousand souls were added to the church. Times of revival, when the Holy Spirit breaks into the normal events of life in a powerful way, have followed down through the centuries – Dundee, New England, Lewis, China etc.
2. People are converted through the preaching of the gospel. Peter’s sermon focused on Jesus. He reported on recent events in Jerusalem – Jesus’ miracles, crucifixion and resurrection. He drew on O.T. Scriptures that spoke of the Messiah. He emphasised God’s sovereign activity and human responsibility. He applied this truth to his audience. God has given us the Scriptures, containing all we need to believe about him and what our duty is towards him. The Holy Spirit spoke his message through the prophets (2 Pet 1:21) and opens men’s hearts today to receive that message. Although Peter used his God-given talents, Bible knowledge through synagogue attendance, and a few years listening to and observing Jesus, yet it was the Holy Spirit in him who guided his choice and presentation of the words and who also worked in the hearts and minds of those who heard. Time and time again words that are well known speak powerfully and freshly to individuals, such that they wonder how the preacher could have known the inner thoughts of their hearts.
3. The reaction of those listening to Peter was powerful. They were convicted of sin (v37), recognising they had done wrong and aware that they deserved God’s judgement. Some of them may have been part of the mob that called for Jesus to be crucified. In their deep concern and sense of guilt they did not run from God but cried out to the apostles. The gospel is for sinners, even the worst of sinners. God has declared he will not turn away anyone who confesses his sin, who is sorry for breaking God’s law (Ps 51:17) and who comes to him in the name of Jesus (John 6:37). Jesus’ core message was “repent and believe.” The root meaning of repentance is a change of mind, but not merely on an intellectual level, but a change of attitude, a determination to change direction. It is essentially a matter of the will. Conversion is a word that describes this process in an individual. Its root meaning is to “turn” – a change of direction. It is a turning to God by those who previously had little or no time for him. This leads to a new personal relationship with God. Believers do not become perfect overnight but they do have a new ruling passion in their lives. God comes first.
4. The work of the Holy Spirit is evident throughout the Pentecost story. It is clearly seen in the gift of tongues which the apostles received and in the “wonders and signs being done through the apostles.” It is also very clearly seen in the transformation of lives under the preaching of the word. People who were spiritually dead were brought into a new and living relationship with God (John 16:9). There were more than three thousand miracles of grace at Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to those who believed. (v38) Important though it is to emphasise the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion, it is equally important to emphasise the responsibility of man.

Conversion is not like catching a virus. We should avoid phrases like, “getting converted” and rather speak of seeking God in prayer, in preaching, in the Scriptures and in meeting with God’s people. Repenting and believing are active, not passive.

5. A new lifestyle follows conversion. It is seen in what believers wish to do. It is seen in their priorities in life. A self-centred life becomes a God-centred life. However imperfectly, they now love God and seek his blessing in their daily lives. The early Christians had a heart for the poor just as Jesus had. (Luke 4:18; 6:20) They shared what they had (vv44,45) even to selling off property in order to meet the needs of others. There was no compulsion to sell and believers still had their own homes in which they met for worship.(v46) Owning property was not wrong but trusting God rather than wealth and using goods to do good were essential to living the new life. The new life in Christ should be seen in a new lifestyle in every believer. At times of revival whole communities are changed with a marked decrease in public profanity, theft, violence etc. New standards are set.

**Activities:** Looking at conversion stories may bring home the truths enshrined in this lesson.

## CHRISTIAN LIFE

### Lesson 23

### Ethiopian Treasurer

Acts 8:26-40

**Aim:** To learn about conversion from the experience of the Ethiopian official.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Discuss the meaning of the word “conversion” as it is used today. E.g. Loft conversion.

1. Jesus had told his disciples “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) After persecution had led to the death of Stephen the disciples scattered. They took the gospel with them wherever they went. Although they fled to preserve their lives they did not give up their faith nor stop telling others about Christ. It was like burning coals being scattered, starting fires wherever they landed. God can and does use the Enemy’s actions to defeat him.
2. An angel sent Philip to a desert road in the South. Gaza was an old Philistine city which had been destroyed more than a century before. Although there was a new Gaza two and a half miles away by the sea, it was to the old ruined city in the desert that Philip had been sent to. Did he wonder why he was being taken from a successful ministry in Samaria to this deserted spot? Whatever he thought, Philip obeyed the angel’s instructions. God has his plan and we are only able to catch glimpses of it from time to time. The man Philip was going to meet would take the knowledge of Jesus to a new country. The Holy Spirit was at work opening the way for a world wide spread of the gospel. Here the good news was being carried into Africa.
3. Ethiopia here refers to the region of Nubia on the Nile, between Aswan (in Egypt) and Kartoum (in Sudan). This land was traditionally governed by the queen-mother, given the official title of Candace (cf, Pharaoh as a title for rulers in Egypt), because the king was considered to be divine and above the mundane matters of governing a country. The Treasurer was an official whose job was like that of our Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was an important position and demanded intelligence and integrity. He “had the charge of all her treasure.” His chariot was probably a covered wagon, slow, uncomfortable but giving protection from the sun and offering time to read and think. Philip heard him reading. It was unusual in ancient times for anyone to read silently.
4. This Ethiopian official had been worshiping in Jerusalem. He was a “God-fearer”, not a Jew but attracted to the faith of Israel. He had the resources for travelling and the education to read the Scriptures. God had already begun to work in his heart. There was a thirst for righteousness and he was looking in the right place.
5. The Ethiopian was studying the book of Isaiah. In his search for truth he had got hold of a copy of one of the books of the Jewish Scriptures but he could not understand what it all meant. God sent Philip to be his interpreter. It is useful to note how the written word and the human messenger were both used to reach the heart of the Ethiopian. It is much the same today. God uses many means to bring people to a knowledge of the Saviour but the Word and an appointed messenger are the normal means of grace.
6. Philip started where the Ethiopian was at and linked the passage from Isaiah to the recent happenings in Jerusalem. Isaiah 53 is one of the clearest presentations of the purpose of Jesus’ life and death. It speaks of the suffering servant who suffers for the sins of God’s people. Surely

the Ethiopian had heard something of what had happened in Jerusalem a few months before. The programme of persecution of the followers of Jesus would have ensured these events were still a talking point. For the Ethiopian treasurer the link between the suffering servant of Isaiah and Jesus of Nazareth completed the picture. Getting alongside the one searching for the truth Philip turned his attention to Jesus. Essentially evangelism today is the same. Those who know Jesus seek to point others to him.

7. The Ethiopian official responded enthusiastically to Philip's teaching. He believed. He asked for baptism. He rejoiced. He had the joy of the man whose sins are forgiven. He had found new life in Christ. The one who was seeking the truth was found by God. He went back to his people a new man in Christ, not just a high ranking official in the Ethiopian court but now also an ambassador for Christ, the king of kings.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets

## CHRISTIAN LIFE

### Lesson 24

### Saul of Tarsus

### Acts 9:1-19

**Aim:** To learn about conversion from the experience of Saul of Tarsus.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Give out appropriate Bible references and ask the young folk to list what they learn about Saul.

1. This is the best known conversion story. The phrase, “a Damascus road experience” has passed into our language and used even by those ignorant of the original story. Luke gives us three accounts in Acts chapters 9, 22 and 26, the latter two being Paul’s account of his own conversion while making his defence firstly before the mob in Jerusalem and secondly before king Agrippa. Paul adds to that his own comments in Galatians 1:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:8. It is clearly an important event in the ongoing march of gospel history.
2. Saul, later known by his Roman name, Paul, was born in Tarsus, an important Roman city in the south east of modern Turkey, making Saul not only a Jew ethnically but also a Roman citizen. He was fluent in Greek and Hebrew and learned the trade of a tent maker. He came from the tribe of Benjamin and at a young age went to Jerusalem to study under the great Rabbi, Gamaliel. His zeal for God, his discipline and native intelligence quickly made him a potent force in Jewish circles. Some think he might even have been a member of the Sanhedrin.
3. However, his devotion to the traditions and teachings of the Jews were coupled with a spiritual blindness. He became a Pharisee and a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. Convinced that Jesus was a false Messiah he bent all his considerable energies, skills, contacts etc towards the eradication of this new movement that was rapidly growing in Jerusalem and Judea. He had started by looking after the clothes of those who stoned Stephen. He had a zeal for God that was dangerously mistaken. How often the fiercest persecutors of Jesus’ followers think they are doing God’s work. The Osama Bin Ladens of this world are all the more dangerous for their conviction that they are God’s instruments in rooting out falsehood. This false conviction finds easy entrance into the heart of man where there is self righteousness and a desire to be seen by men as holier than others. It is present in the squabbles that tear churches apart.
4. The scattering of believers due to persecution in Judea took some of them to Damascus. Saul now armed himself with legal documents from the high priest and pursued these believers with the intention of dragging them back to Jerusalem in chains. Damascus lay 135 miles north east of Jerusalem. It was an ancient city in an oasis on the border of the Arabian desert and on the main trading route between Mesopotamia and Egypt. It is still an important Middle Eastern city today.
5. However, the would-be apprehender was himself apprehended. God had plans for Saul and also the means to break into the heart of this proud, fierce Pharisee. A bright light, brighter than the noonday Middle Eastern sun, suddenly shone around them and brought the whole company to a halt. While all fell to the ground and all heard something, only Saul heard a voice speaking directly to him. (Acts 22:9) Saul had been like oxen dragging their feet and needing the prodding of the sharp goads to direct them in the right way. Saul must have been resisting the indications he had that Jesus was Lord – reports of Jesus’ ministry, accounts of the resurrection, the willingness of believers to suffer for the name of Jesus, the testimony of Stephen, the witness of the Scriptures and other evidence that Saul did not want to notice. Was the fierceness of his persecution in part

an attempt to silence a conscience that was accusing him?

6. There on the road Saul received his commission as apostle to the gentiles “to open their eyes”, he himself being temporarily blinded physically while his spiritual blindness was permanently removed (Acts 26:18). But he first had to go into Damascus. There, one of the believers, Ananias, whom he had come to arrest, would lovingly address him as “brother Saul”, heal him from the physical blindness that had come on him, confirm the commission he had received and baptise him. (Acts 22:12-14) Where God has forgiven, his children must follow suit.
7. There would be many dramatic conversions in the history of the church but Saul’s conversion with its direct revelation from heaven was tailored to Saul’s needs and God’s plan for him. The arch persecutor became the apostle willing to suffer hardship and death. The bigoted Pharisee became the humble servant of Christ whose writings make up a large part of the New Testament.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets

## CHRISTIAN LIFE

### Lesson 25

### Lydia and the Jailer

Acts 16:16-40

**Aim:** To learn about conversion from the experiences of Lydia and the Philippian jailer.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Briefly revise the previous lesson on Saul by way of indicating how varied conversions are.

1. God, who alone is the author of conversion, deals with each sinner as their personality and circumstances require. Without the work of the Holy Spirit there can be no repentance and faith in Christ. By God's grace the sinner comes to a knowledge of Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures. In this lesson we look at the first two converts from Paul's first missionary foray into Europe, a God-fearing business woman and a tough Roman soldier.
2. In God's dealings with individuals many things are put in place to bring about the desired result. Paul set out to follow up the work he had started in the area we call Turkey today. Having visited the churches formed during his first missionary journey he was led by the Spirit to the coastal town of Troas where he received the vision of the man from Macedonia appealing to him to cross over to Europe. (Acts 16:6-10)
3. A business woman, dealing in expensive purple cloth, from the city of Thyatira in the province of Asia (Western Turkey), was in Philippi, the Roman colony in Macedonia (northern Greece) on the important road from Rome to the east. She had contact with the Jewish Scriptures and was seeking to know God. There was no synagogue in Philippi (ten Jewish men were required before a synagogue can be formed) but a number of women met together for prayer. Paul found them there and initiated a conversation with them. God was drawing together the strands in his plan for Lydia.
4. Quietly but surely God opened Lydia's heart as she heard Paul speak –God's messenger with God's message. She found what she had been seeking for some time. This change in her heart led to other changes. She and her household, perhaps including slaves as well as family, were baptised. Already her faith is affecting those around her. She also offered hospitality to Paul and Silas, a practical expression of her love for God and for his children, especially those to whom she owed much in bring her the gospel of Jesus Christ.
5. With the Philippian jailer there was the same messenger, the same message and the same Holy Spirit working faith in his heart but the circumstances were very different. God was in these circumstances too. Even the evil intentions of the enemy and children are used to bring about God's saving purposes.
6. We can start with the incitement of the mob against Paul who lovingly delivered a slave girl from the evil spirit that possessed her and that provided her masters with a source of income being used by them as a fortune-teller. The healing of the slave girl was a loss to these hard hearted and greedy men. The upshot was a kangaroo court, severe beatings for Paul and Silas and incarceration in a dark and smelly dungeon, their feet being held most uncomfortably in stocks. Their spirits, however, were free as their voices were raised in praises to God.
7. God's messenger was removed from the market place but, in God's providence, was right where he needed to be to reach the next individual God was pursuing in love. The jailer was a Roman

soldier, who had served the empire in the army and was now given a job in Philippi, which had been re-founded after the battle of Philippi in 42 BC., when it was stocked with army veterans and made a Roman colony with exemption from certain taxes. Thus God's messenger with God's message were now in contact with this man about whose character we know next to nothing but whose background in the army brought him into contact with violence and brutality.

8. An earthquake that opened all doors of the prison was the final push as God opened the doors of this man's heart. It brought the jailer to his knees before Paul with the question, "What must I do to be saved?", eliciting the clear response, "Believe on the Lord Jesus ...". The question and the answer are as valid today as two thousand years ago. As with Lydia the new found faith had immediate results. The jailer attended to the needs of Paul and Silas, he and his family were baptised and they all rejoiced.
9. Paul's final act before having to leave Philippi was to complain that his rights as a Roman citizen had been violated by the magistrates. This no doubt left the small church founded by Paul in a stronger position in the community.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## CHRISTIAN LIFE

### Lesson 26

### Baptism and the Lord's Supper

**Aim:** To explain the basics of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper.

**Materials:** Westminster Shorter Catechism Nos. 92-97. Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Get the young folk talking about any baptismal services or Communion services they attended.

1. The New Testament presents us with only two sacraments commanded by Christ – Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Matt 28:19; 1Cor 11:23-26) A sacrament is a means of grace in which things that can be seen, touched, tasted or smelled are used to accompany the word. In baptism water is used and in the Lord's Supper it is bread and wine. A means of grace is a channel God uses to bless his people with spiritual understanding and fill their heart with love for him.
2. Baptism is the sacrament associated with becoming part of God's family, part of his covenant people. A covenant in the Bible is God's promise to his people requiring their response in faith and obedience and usually involves a sign. In Old Testament times a covenant was made with Abraham and his descendants. The sign of the covenant was the circumcision of all males, usually as babies. In New Testament times the covenant extends to all who trust in Christ. No matter what their ethnic origin they are seen as children of Abraham, believing God's promises just as he had believed, and being part of the fulfilment of the promise that all nations would be blessed in him. (Gal. 3:7) Gentiles are "grafted in" to the stock of Israel (Rom.11:17) and are "now fellow citizens with God's people." (Eph.2:13). The sign of the covenant, now baptism, continues to be applied to the children of God's covenant people. In the last few lessons we saw how the Ethiopian treasurer, Saul, Lydia (and her household) and the jailer (and his household) were all baptised after believing on Jesus. At Pentecost a great number believed and were baptised with 3,000 being added to the church. Peter reminded them that "the promise is unto you and to your children ..." (Acts 2:39-41)
3. Water is a sign of washing and symbolises the cleansing from sin that is brought about by the blood of the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Zechariah spoke of "a fountain open ... to cleanse from sin ..." (Zech.13:1) It shows how central is the idea of the stain of sin being taken away, its guilt removed and the pardoned sinner entering into a new relationship with God. Christ "is not ashamed to call them brothers." (Heb. 2:11) This relationship involves the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and so it is appropriate that baptism is administered in the name of the Trinity as Jesus commanded. It is important that parents who take baptismal vows for their children make every effort to ensure they understand for themselves their need of cleansing.
4. The outward application of baptism brings one into a fellowship, the church on earth. Where there is genuine faith this sacrament also symbolises entry into a deeper spiritual fellowship with the Triune God and all the saints. In Acts 10:45-48 baptism is connected with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit who comes into the life of every believer.
5. The Lord's Supper, known also as Communion, is the sacrament of ongoing fellowship with God and with other believers centred on a shared interest in the shed blood and broken body of our Lord when he died on the cross to set his people free from the guilt and power of sin. All who trust in Christ are commanded by him to take part in this sacrament. It is for sinners who know their sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb. It is not reserved for some superior class of more spiritual Christian. It is a means of grace intended to strengthen even the weakest in faith. What is required

of those participating in this sacrament is saving faith in Christ. (1Cor.11:28; 2Cor.13:4; 1Cor.5:8)

6. The broken bread and poured out wine symbolise Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. Christians are commanded to remember what Christ did for them and what it cost him. As a means of grace it is effective through faith and is always accompanied by a proclamation of God's word. The bread and the wine remain bread and wine but Christ is present by faith in the sacrament. (1Cor.10:16)
7. The visible and tangible signs associated with the sacraments are very meaningful. Sometimes we need more than words, even more than the verbal images that Christ used so tellingly in his teaching. However, the sinful tendency is to multiply symbolism beyond what Christ has commanded and this leads to idolatry, to superstitiously investing in material objects a quality that makes them a substitute for faith in God. Images, crucifixes and icons came into the Christian church early on. In contrast the New Testament sacraments focus our attention on Christ. May the young folk be helped to see Christ in the sacraments.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

**Lesson 27 is a revision lesson using the notes for lessons 22 – 26.**

**Lesson 28 is Time to Talk based on ideas that might have arisen from that set of lessons. How you use this worksheet will depend on the age and makeup of your class. Some find it best to ask three students to be the three page 1 characters, allowing them to read the parts and discuss the subjects raised.**

## ETHICS

### Lesson 29

### Keep My Commandments

### Matthew 5:17-20

**Aim:** To explore the Ten Commandments looking at their relevance and application.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk to come up with things they think are wrong.

1. The sense of right and wrong is a basic instinct in all human beings. It is arguably the strongest philosophical evidence for the existence of God. It is the most obvious expression of our being made in the image of God. No other animal has this instinct and we do not hold any other animal responsible in a moral sense for their actions. Human beings are unique in the created world in this characteristic alone, whatever else may be the case in other areas of our being. It is popular today for secularists to deny absolute moral standards. They say, "That may be wrong for you but it is not wrong for me." They reduce moral standards to the level of personal preference, like taste in food and music. However, no one seems to be able to live with this. For gross crimes against little children, for example, there is universal condemnation. The child's response, "It's not fair" comes from a deeply rooted conviction in all of us. Some things simply are wrong.
2. If there is an absolute standard of morality such that all human beings are subject to it, then there must be a law giver who is above human authority and who can command obedience. The Bible presents us with such an authority. We are God's creation, made in his image and subject to his laws. In passing it should be noted that all moral standards, i.e. rules governing the way we live on a daily basis, are grounded on a bedrock of more fundamental beliefs, e.g. "Does truth exist?"; "Does God exist?" This is true for the atheist as for the religious person. How we live our lives is rooted in the most basic beliefs, whether these have been absorbed unthinkingly from our surroundings or have been carefully thought through.
3. The Bible presents us with the Ten Commandments as a summary of the Law of God. This is further summarised in "love God with all your heart ... soul ... mind" (from Deut 6:5) and "love your neighbour as yourself" (from Lev. 19:18) in Jesus reply to the scribe (Matt. 22:34-40), emphasising the deeply personal nature of the Ten Commandments. Each one is couched in terms of how our actions affect some person. It is certainly not a dry, impersonal rule book. The Pharisees tried to keep the law by breaking it down into specific things to do or not to do, adding many of their own rules (e.g. 39 Sabbath laws) to try to ensure they kept the Law perfectly. However, they failed to keep the Law because they failed to address the foundational issue of love. They were unwilling to help others and unwilling to face up to the reality of their own corruption. They were hypocrites. Jesus told his disciples that their righteousness had to "exceed" that of the Pharisees. (Matt.5:20)
4. The Ten Commandments are still relevant to us today. Jesus used the Law of Moses to shed light on these commandments. He certainly never abrogated them. (Matt.5:17-19) Other teaching shows that "there is none righteous", we all fall short of obedience to God and, indeed, cannot keep God's law without his enabling. Human frailty is no excuse. The standard remains. Measuring ourselves by God's revealed law lets us know what needs to be put right in our lives. It alerts us to things we need to deal with by repentance, prayer and positive action. Righteousness is more than knowing what is right it must also be doing what is right. (James 1:19-27)
5. God has given his children the resources to combat sin. We daily sin in thought word and deed. That is a fact, not an excuse. "God is faithful, and ... with the temptation will provide the way of

escape.” (1 Cor.10:13)

6. The Ten Commandments were given to Israel in the context of what God had done for them in taking them out of slavery in Egypt. This motif of redemption is brought out in the prologue to the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy. (Deut. 5:6) In New Testament times God's giving his own Son to die for us is the supreme reason why we must endeavour, in the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, to be holy as he is holy. “If you love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) We love him because he first loved us. We love our neighbour because we first love God.
7. A divine law giver means there is a divine judgement. Just as atheism will lead inevitably to moral anarchy because there is no law beyond the whim of man, so also atheism leads to hopelessness. Hitler, Stalin, Herod and all the worst criminals of our times got away with it. They died like every one else and that was the end of the matter. But God exist. He is the Judge of all the Earth and he will do right.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## ETHICS

### Lesson 30

### Parents and Children

### Ephesians 6:1-4

**Aim:** To look at Biblical principles for the parent child relationship.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Set the young folk a hypothetical or, better still, a real life scenario, involving a teenager and parents, to discuss and decide what the teenager or the parent should do.

1. The family unit is the basic unit of society. Man was made a being that needs the company of others to be complete. "It is not good that man should be alone." The husband wife relationship is the closest human bond involving love and trust to a high degree. To this is added the parent child relationship of a family in which children grow up with love, trust and an appreciation of legitimate authority. Our society, with its tangled and fractured family life, leaves many requiring additional support and understanding. God is our father and we are his children. Christ is not ashamed to call us "brothers". God, himself, in his triune nature is a fellowship of persons where perfect love exists for all eternity. Those whom he has created in his image, he has set in families.
2. The fifth commandment instructs children to honour their parents. (Ex.20:12) This means love, respect and obedience. (Col.3:20) In an aggressively individualistic society, where everyone is encouraged to assert their own authority, it is not natural for anyone to submit to anyone else. It is important we understand our times in order for this commandment to be understood correctly. Young folk need to be helped to realise that they will absorb attitudes and values from the society they belong to, from friends, family, church, TV, magazines, songs, school etc., and that these attitudes may not all be healthy. God's requirement that we all submit ourselves "one to another in the fear of God" (Eph.5:21) is a radical principle that should inform all human relationships. Growing out of this is the additional requirement to obey those in authority over us, for all authority is from God and a rejection of authority is a rejection of God.
3. Problems will arise from the presence of sin in the parent child relationship. The parents may be unreasonable at times. None are perfect and some are a real danger to their children. Love is something we owe to other persons and does not depend on approval of their character or actions. Respect is something we owe to those set over us and relates to their God given authority. Obedience must follow, except where there is a clear clash between a parental request and God's revealed will. Given natural tendencies and current social attitudes it is important to emphasise the need to obey. Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." The wider family of God is important in helping to pick up the pieces when family relationships go wrong.
4. Paul also speaks to parents, warning them not to exasperate their children. (v4) Personal relationships are two way. Often parents are guilty of provoking their children to unacceptable behaviour. To avoid this, parents must treat their children fairly - no favouritism, no unjust nor excessive punishments, no mistreatment. There must be interest taken in the child's needs and aspirations, in getting to know the child and make him/her aware that he/she is important. Much of the problems of our society can be traced to breakdown in families and that breakdown traced to parental failures where work, recreation etc. squeeze out the time needed for parent child bonding. Even with Christian parents involved in the Lord's work this is not an uncommon failure. Time must also be spent on the child's spiritual needs, encouraging them from an early age to form a relationship with God and a knowledge and understanding of his word, involving them when appropriate in family worship, discussions of spiritual and moral issues backed by. Domestic

violence is a reality even in church circles and must never be condoned.

5. The obligation to honour our parents changes in its expression as we grow up but does not go away so long as our parents are alive. In their old age we must make provision in our busy schedules to see to their emotional as well as physical needs. Children need to grow up knowing that family ties have longer term obligations and opportunities for expressing love.
6. The fifth commandment also has a promise attached to it – life and prosperity. (v2) There can be no doubt that the safety of a loving family bond brings immediate blessings in this life to the children involved and that rebellion by the children against this provision lays them open to many dangers. However, as with all the promises of God to his people, the fuller understanding that the New Testament brings of far greater eternal blessing for those who love God puts the prospects of earthly prosperity into a new perspective, with a guarantee from our heavenly Father.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets but make sure there is time for discussions.

## ETHICS

### Lesson 31

### Respect for Life

Exodus 20:13; 1 John 3:9-15

**Aim:** To understand the Biblical teaching on the sanctity of life.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk for examples of violence they have come across recently.

1. Of all the Ten Commandments the sixth, "You shall not murder", is probably the most universally acknowledged. Legally it is the premeditated killing of a human being. However, there are those who promote abortion as a means of solving the problem of unwanted pregnancy while others consider this to be the unlawful killing of innocent, helpless, unborn children. At the other end of life euthanasia is being promoted as a means of coping with painful, terminal illness. To some it's mercy killing. To others it's murder. It must be stressed that what is seen to be right or wrong follows from more basic beliefs about God and man. Is there a judgement after death? Does God exist and does he care? Is there life after death? What does it mean to be human?
2. The bottom line for the Christian is that God alone has the authority to take life from one made in his image. He has given it and he will take it away. (Job1:21) Life before birth is capable of independent reaction to external stimuli as when the unborn John leapt in his mother's womb when Mary visited. (Luke 1:44) Psalm 139:13-16 teaches that God is at work in prenatal development. When we look forward to the birth of a baby we think of the unborn as a human child. Abortion is an assault on human life at its most vulnerable. This still leaves undecided the issue of when this human life began. The Bible talks in terms of conception and not biologically precise terms like, fertilisation. Likewise at the end of life's journey God alone has the right to terminate life, no matter what the pain or suffering. Indeed, pain itself clouds ones judgement and makes it a very inappropriate time to think of ending a life.
3. There is also the question of what is murder as distinct from lawful killing – capital punishment, self defence especially in time of war. Is carelessness murder when it leads to loss of life, e.g. is fast driving or driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, murder?
4. The sanctity of human life is a phrase used to emphasise the breadth of the commandment, the seriousness of taking life and the importance of promoting a positive attitude to life. It not only deals with actual killing but also with any violence that inflicts pain, mental or physical, on another. This violence may be a failure to support and protect the vulnerable. The Good Samaritan could have walked past the man who had been mugged and left for dead. The Samaritan was not responsible for the mugging and might be in danger himself if he dallied on the way. Yet it is clear from the parable what was required from one who loved God.
5. Preserving our own lives is part of the right attitude to the sanctity of life. Do we live healthy lives? Self indulgence in what we eat or drink, in sexual behaviour, in lack of healthy exercise will have a cumulative, negative effect on one's health, as will unnecessary exposure to danger and stress.
6. How do we influence our society in the way public resources are used? People are dying in some parts of the world for lack of basic sanitation. Can we ignore their plight and be blameless before God? To love our neighbour with all our hearts is what God requires of us. Where that is lacking we will be guilty of breaching the sixth commandment. The Law of Moses required a

house owner to put a parapet round the flat roof of his house (Deut.22:8) lest the owner be guilty if someone fell off the roof and died. The modern equivalent are laws that require people in all walks of life to promote safety – traffic regulations, use of knives, control of food additives, war on drugs etc.

7. John's first letter (3:15) brings out the teaching of Jesus who focussed on the heart of man rather than external rules and regulations when talking about moral issues. He made it clear that it is possible for a person to break a commandment, even the sixth commandment, in thought. Hatred of another is tantamount to murder even though not a drop of blood is shed. (Matt 5:21:22) Bearing a grudge and its consequence, vengeance, are both condemned by the Law. (Lev.19:17-18) Over the years we learn to put on a public face, conform outwardly to norms of behaviour that will lead to acceptance by our peers and learn self-discipline to stop our inner sinfulness (greed, selfishness, anger, pride, lust, hatred etc.) from breaking out in behaviour that would alienate us from those we wish to impress. But God looks on the heart and he sees what we are in the innermost core of our beings. To counteract this we must ensure we have regular times when we allow our hearts to be searched by a prayerful reading of God's Word.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## ETHICS

### Lesson 32

### Respect for Property

Exodus 20:15; Ephesians 4:28

**Aim:** To understand the Biblical attitude to material wealth

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk for examples of what they think of as stealing

1. The Ten Commandments are rules that govern personal relationships, firstly our relationship with God and secondly our relationship with fellow human beings. They can be summed up in love for God and for our neighbour. It is a mistake to think of them as impersonal regulations. It is often the case that property rights and truth telling are set out in regulations that distance one from the real people who are affected by our actions and words. New Christians in the church in Ephesus had to be taught very basic things about the way they were to live in order that they might “not grieve the Holy Spirit” and might “be kind to one another.” (Eph.4:30,32)
2. Viewed in this way we can understand better the breadth of a true Christian approach to property. What belongs to another is not only physical goods but also his/her reputation, health, time etc. All of these can be stolen. David was incensed with the heartlessness of the rich man who had taken the poor man’s lamb. In this way he was convicted of his own sin in taking Uriah’s wife and then his life. As a king his actions had also robbed the people by undermining public morality.
3. It is right and proper to own goods. The commandment clearly establishes the right of private property, but it does so on the strict understanding that goods are held in stewardship, for “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”.
4. How we acquire our property is important. Proverbs condemns sharp practice. “It is not good. It is no good’, says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase”. (Prv.20:14) We all love a bargain but people must not be cheated, neither by the buyer nor by the seller. Theft comes in many guises – shop lifting, tax evasion, holding on to lost property that we find, claiming wages for time we have not worked, dodging a bus fare, using employer’s goods for our own personal use (office paper, telephone time, building materials, car fuel), downloading copyright music or video or computer programmes illegally, copying homework, etc. To take what belongs to another, without their free consent, is wrong. The clear distinction between mine and thine is crucial to a well ordered society.
5. We must be prepared to deal with temptation to commit a dishonest action. Regular reading and prayer reminds us that God sees us. He knows what we do even if teachers, police and parents never know. Cultivating contentment (Phil.4:11-12) helps combat covetousness which is the main cause of our giving in to temptation. Having a selfish disposition and allowing ourselves to think a lot about what we don’t have is dangerous.
6. What we do with our money is what matters and that will be dictated by our attitude to what is ours. We are encouraged to work in order to earn an honest living and not be sponging on others. (Eph.4:28) We have a duty to support family members. (1 Tim.5:8) For the young this means working hard at school to prepare for future responsibilities. Christians also have a duty to support the work of the gospel. (Gal.6:6) In the OT God’s people were expected to give a tenth of their income for the temple ministry. We are encouraged to place our trust in God rather

than in riches - "The love of money is a root of all evil" (1Tim.6:10) and Jesus' words, "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also" and "you cannot serve God and money" (Matt.6:21-24).

7. Selfishness will lead to a hardness of heart towards those in need and is itself a form of idolatry. "The poor you have always with you," and the parable of the Good Samaritan along with the solemn words at the close of Matthew 5 are teachings of Jesus we cannot ignore. Our God is the God of the poor and we must show a similar concern. (Eph.4:28) Organisations such as Fairtrade and Tearfund enable us as individuals to reach out to those in need, not forgetting the causes of much of the poverty in human greed and aggression. Unjust trade practices have their implications for individuals. Richer countries often abuse their economic power, exploiting poorer peoples, in order to maintain high levels of luxury for their own citizens. We all have a responsibility to use the means at our disposal to speak up for the down-trodden, even if that might mean a reduction in the level of comfort in our own lives. Simply going along with the status quo may bring guilt on us individually for the collective actions of our self-centred, materialistic communities.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## Lesson 33

## Respect for the Truth

Exodus 20:16; John 14:6

**Aim:** To understand the Biblical teaching on truthfulness.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Show some current adverts and news headlines and ask the young folk if they think the truth is being distorted.

1. Moral relativism is the most insidious and destructive force today in the world of values. It is important to note that there is such a thing as truth. Because God exists, reality exists. Because we are made in his image we can know the truth. Because we are fallen creatures we tend to distort the truth. Jesus said, "I am the ... truth". God is the key to true knowledge of ultimate reality.
2. The commandments cannot be isolated from each other. They are not self-contained rules of conduct. Breaking one commandment usually involves breaking others. Sometimes they simply come as part of a bundle of sins. Truthfulness is usually the first casualty in any sin.
3. The devil "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord". (Prov. 12:22) Rev 21:28 pictures all liars as cast into the lake of fire. Lying is clearly a serious matter in the Bible. "Truth has fallen in the streets" said Isaiah the prophet. That is very much true of our own age. We expect politicians to pervert the truth - presenting a one-sided picture, misusing statistics, employing a professional spin doctor. We do not expect the salesman to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Little more than a generation ago a business man's word was his bond. Now they are surrounded by smart legal experts reading or writing lengthy printed agreements complete with fine print. Celebrity photos are doctored by computer graphics. Films/novels/plays distort historic truth for dramatic effect and values are subtly promoted in ways that influence how we behave although based on a false view of reality.
4. On the other hand the Bible promotes truth telling. (Eph.4:25; Col.3:9) God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and his family must reflect that side of his nature, firstly "speaking the truth in his heart" and then keeping his tongue from slander. (Psalm 15) James 3 gives a powerful picture of the damage a tongue can do.
5. From an early age we learn to deceive others. It comes naturally to our sinful, self-centred natures. Truth is bent to promote our image (exaggerating the facts), to promote our careers (inaccurate c.v.), to get us out of a tight spot (selective presentation of the facts) and in many other ways we paint a word picture that distorts reality in order to save our skins or avoid embarrassment. The "little white lie" has become a respectable tactic for parents and teachers in smoothing out the roughness of daily living. And that is before we come to straight forward untruths, i.e. blatant lies.
6. Truth promotes trust and compromising the truth destroys trust. If we are in the habit of dissembling then others cannot trust us. Children learn quickly to copy this pattern of bending the truth for our own convenience. The result is long term damage to trust and severe damage to a personal relationship. Cultivating the habit of truthfulness is vital. One lie can destroy trust.
7. Once again it is important to note that in the ninth commandment we are dealing with people

and not cold regulations. It is about falsehood that hurts human beings rather than about words that misrepresent reality. To tell the “truth” in such a way that it does real damage to someone is also wrong. It is neither kind nor necessary to keep reminding people of disabilities they have or mistakes they have made. Sometimes it is better to remain silent. Sometimes we do not have the right to speak. To tell the “truth” in such a way that it conveys a false picture is also wrong. How common it is for those who pride themselves on being truthful to fall into the trap of choosing their words carefully to create a false impression. They haven’t said anything untrue but they have deliberately communicated in such a way as to deceive. Carelessness with the truth – when we pass on rumours without checking their veracity or when there is no need to pass them on at all - is a common failing. Malicious gossip is particularly bad and slander is clearly a breach of the commandment. Are we speaking to help someone or to boost our egos?

8. With the emphasis on the personal impact of our words comes the suggestion that some people, in some circumstances, may not be entitled to the truth. Would we be right to tell a murderer where his intended victim is hiding? We are not likely to face that extreme situation, although some have, but we may be faced with situations where a straightforward answer would give someone with evil intent the ammunition to hurt another. We may be called on to remain silent to our own hurt.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

**LESSON 34 IS A REVISION LESSON ON LESSONS 29 – 33**

**LESSON 35 IS TIME TO TALK WHICH RAISES SOME OF THE MANY ISSUES THAT  
COME FROM THE SET OF ETHICS LESSONS**

## FOUR PSALMS

### Lesson 36

### God Can Be Trusted Daily

### Psalm 34

**Aim:** To encourage the young folk to take their concerns to God every day.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk to write down things that worried them over the past week.

1. There are a number of acrostic psalms, each verse in the original beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmists did not feel the need to slavishly follow the formula. In Psalm 34 the letter “waw” is missing and, after the final “teth” another verse is added. The message was more important than the form.
2. The setting for this psalm is the lowest point in David’s career, if measured in worldly terms. Saul was openly and vigorously hunting him down. Having fled for his life, he leaves Israel and looks for refuge in Gath, one of the five cities of the Philistines - surely an indication of his desperation as a lonely exile. There king Achish (Abimelech in the psalm’s header is probably a title for the king) receives him favourably but others remember how David had killed Goliath and routed the Philistines in battle and make things very ugly for him. To escape this new threat he pretends to be mad and the Philistine king allows him the freedom he needs to escape.
3. In political and career terms it was a low point. In spiritual terms it produced two psalms of deep faith – Psalms 34 and 56. “When I am afraid I put my trust in you.” (56:3) Derek Kidner comments, “Faith is seen here as a deliberate act, in defiance of one’s emotional state.” If Psalm 56 ends on a note of thanksgiving Psalm 34 is pure unalloyed thanksgiving.
4. The focus of Psalm 34 is on God’s protection of his people. The first half alternates between personal testimony to God’s faithfulness and encouragements to others to trust and praise him. We are always encouraged to see what God has done for us and to share our blessing with others. “... let us exalt his name together.” (v3) Shared life is the experience of the Trinity. It should be the experience of those created in the image of God, especially those raised to new life in Christ.
5. The blessing for David grew in the soil of perplexing and frightening experiences. All earthly props in his life had been removed. He was stripped of everything he could depend on except God. So often this has been the experience of God’s people. Only when the storms rage within us and around us do we turn to our Father in heaven, recognising in him our only hope. David’s determination to praise the Lord “at all times” (v1) grew from such a dark time. Our choice is either to turn to God in faith, however small, or to search more desperately for human help. The latter will end eventually in despair.
6. Whatever our age we are not strangers to fear and insecurity. David’s cry to God leads to deliverance from the fear that gripped him and the troubles that gave rise to it. Fear is a human emotion and is not sinful in itself, although it can indicate a lack of faith, but it is part of our created defensive mechanism in face of danger. However, it can be crippling and paralysing. Faith looks beyond the troubles to the One who can deliver us, (vv4,6) filling our

hearts with “the peace of God that passes understanding”.

7. It is natural to want to tell others about experiences that make us glad. Sin twists that desire into gloating and a selfish desire to exclude others from our blessing. Grace makes us want to see others receive the same blessing. It tells others what God has done for us and invites them to experience this blessing for themselves. (vv4,5) It is beautifully expressed in the words, “O, taste and see that God is good ...” (v8)
8. These blessings include the material. (vv9,10) The picture of the young lions going hungry but God’s people being cared for is more fully presented to us by Jesus, who focuses on the humble sparrow being fed by its Creator, and reminds us that God cares more for us than for the birds.
9. The second half of the psalm expands on the “fear of God” which is the beginning of wisdom, a wisdom that includes understanding (v11), right speech (v13), rejection of ways that lead to evil and pursuit of peace (v14) and keeps its eye on God who, in turn, never takes His eye off His child (v15). This teaching is interlaced with the ringing confidence of the psalmist in the One who alone is worthy of our trust. (vv 15, 18, 19, 22)

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## FOUR PSALMS

### Lesson 37

### God's Word Our Guide

### Psalm 119:9-16

**Aim:** To see the Bible as our guide through life.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Ask the young folk to think of where they might go to find answers to their problems – friends, family, books, Google etc.

1. Psalm 119 is another acrostic psalm, this time each consecutive letter of the alphabet is used to begin the eight verses of successive sub divisions of what is the longest chapter in the Bible. It is meditative in nature and the different teachings are found more like flavours mingling in a rich and well prepared dish. The main theme throughout is the Word of God, not a cold study of it, but a delight in it and a love for it.

2. Eight different words are used for Scripture in this psalm, exploring the many facets of God's precious revelation to man. They should not be too rigidly defined. These and the words, "your ways" (v 3,37) "your name" (v132) "your faithfulness" (v90) "a pledge" (v122) all speak of God's revelation of himself. Only verses 84 and 121 have no mention of such revelation. While each term has its own focus they do overlap and the poetic form of the passage may at times have as much to do with the choice of word as the psalmist's working through his message.

- "Law" (v18) is the word most often used. It means instruction, both as in a single commandment or as in a body of laws. Its emphasis is on words from God that need to be obeyed.
- "Word" (v9) is a very general term expressing God's truth however presented. In this verse its particular relevance for the young is emphasised. It tells us how to live in order to get the best out of life. Cf. Proverbs 2. It is particularly important that we learn God's way, before our characters are moulded by sin and our consciences desensitised to wrong doing; while we are yet open to new ideas; before destructive habits destroy us physically and spiritually leaving us with bitter memories; while there is time to grow as God would have us develop.
- "Commandments" (v10) emphasize the authority of what is said. They do not speak as mere persuasion but as declaring what is right as distinct from what is wrong in our life style. For centuries moral values in the West rested on Biblical authority. His commands are not burdensome but rather designed to protect life and promote real joy. They warn us against the pleasures that bring painful consequences. Today we see moral choices promoted without any more authority than the whim of majority opinion.
- "Promise" (v11) is very close to "word" and is derived from the verb "to say". This verse reminds us of the great value of a memory stocked with Scripture truth. This will prove a valuable defence in times of temptation, hostility, personal difficulties and decision making. Scripture choruses and psalms frequently sung are a very useful aid to memorising Scripture. It is while the mind is young that memory is more easily trained.
- "Statutes" (v12) speak of the permanence of Scripture like laws engraved on stone. We are invited to bless God for this gift of certainty in the world of values. Our world today is a sea of uncertainty and badly needs to rediscover the statutes of the living God.
- "Ordinances"/"judgements"/"decrees" (v13) are the words of the Judge concerning everyday living. They deal with rights and duties and fairness in the way people deal with one another.
- "Testimonies" (v14) point to God's word as a witness to us or even against us. God's word is

faithful, frank and outspoken in its presentation of God's demands in our spiritual need. Such testimony is designed not as a put down but like a medical diagnosis that alerts one to a serious condition and comes with the appropriate treatment.

- "Precepts" (v15) focus on particular instructions from the Lord who expects to be obeyed even in the detail. This verse calls on us to spend time with God, mulling over our Maker's instructions for life and making them so much a part of our thinking that we will not forget them.

3. All of this underlines for us the supreme importance of Scripture. God not only exists, the living and true God, the almighty creator of the whole universe, but he has spoken. Through his prophets, and especially through his Son, he tells us what we are "to believe concerning him and what duty he requires of us." That revelation comes to us in the Bible.

4. Not only do we need the Bible, we also need the Holy Spirit to "open our eyes" (v18) so that we might understand what God is saying to us. We are spiritually blind until God works in our hearts.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## FOUR PSALMS

### Lesson 38

### Persecution

### Psalm 124

**Aim:** To see the reality of persecution and see God as the defence of his people.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Talk about some recent news item that links with persecution of Christians.

1. Psalm 124 is part of that group of psalms, 120 through 134, known as "Songs of Ascent". They were the psalms sung by pilgrims from all over Israel on their way up to Jerusalem for the great feasts of the Lord. These feasts were times of fellowship when people drew near to God and their faith was strengthened. They focussed on divine deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The pilgrims sang from hearts full of gratitude for God's redemption.
2. We too are on a pilgrimage through life. Here we have no permanent home but we look to the place prepared for us, that house of many rooms (John 14:2), that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2Cor.5:1) where fellowship with God will be untrammelled by sin and uninterrupted by adversity. The final verses of the Bible talk of the blessedness of those who wash their robes and enter the New Jerusalem. (Rev.22:14)
3. However, here we have adversity: loss, pain, enmity etc. Psalm 124 is a precious word for pilgrims today meeting with the full ferocity of the enemy as they journey heavenwards. Down through the centuries God's people have suffered persecution. We can think of Biblical examples such as Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace or Stephen the first Christian martyr (cf. Heb.11:35-38). We can turn to the stories of the martyrs in the Roman Empire or the Covenanters in our own land. Such persecution has not ceased. The twentieth century saw more Christian martyrs than all the previous centuries put together. The twenty first century has seen increased persecution.
4. The background to this psalm is some incident like the determined effort of the Philistines to destroy David and his kingdom immediately after the death of Saul. It was a low point in the life of the nation and things looked bleak indeed for David. (2Sam.5:17) The enemy was powerful and determined to ensure Israel did not rise from the ashes of defeat. David was their particular target.
5. David describes this threat with four dramatic images. V3 speaks of being swallowed alive, suddenly in one gulp, as in an earthquake where the earth opens up. V4 pictures the victim washed away by a flash flood such as are common in southern Israel where dry beds of seasonal streams can suddenly turn to raging torrents. Verses 6-7 move into the realm of the animal kingdom, firstly with the picture of a savage beast and secondly that of the snare set to capture the unwary bird. These images may well seem relevant today. Certainly in many parts of the world Christians suffer taunts, discrimination, opposition, physical assaults, imprisonment and even death. In our own land there is much to be thankful for but there are also signs of intolerance towards those who put God first and try to obey his Word.
6. The source of David's hope is the same for ourselves. The Lord was his deliverer. (vv 1,2) The one who enabled him as a youth to take on the giant, Goliath, was still with him. Even facing the Philistine army with a demoralised and divided Israel he knew he could win because God was on his side. Indeed, we are told that God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

When his people turn to him in their extremity then he will answer and deliver them. Their hope lies in the fact that they are Israel, God's people, the people of the promise. He never leaves his "Israel". (Heb.13:5,6) In verse 2 the contrast is between the Lord and men. No matter who are ranged against us they are mere men. Even when we take into account the might of Satan, the great enemy of our souls, we recognise that he who is for us is greater than he who is against us. The captain of our salvation is the Almighty Lord of Hosts who made heaven and earth (v6).

7. At times we fail to feel his presence with us. We are like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus who are filled with sorrow and greatly perplexed by the sudden turn of events in Jerusalem that has robbed them of their beloved master and dashed all their hopes. They fail to recognise Jesus walking with them. It is important to be in touch with God on a daily basis through prayer and Bible reading. We don't always know when the storm will break and constant contact with our deliverer is essential for survival. "Watch and pray lest you fall into temptation" are words of Jesus to his disciples in Gethsemane that are always relevant.

**Activities:** Complete the worksheets.

## FOUR PSALMS

### Lesson 39

### God of the Poor

### Psalms 146

**Aim:** To understand God's heart for the poor.

**Materials:** Bible, pens/pencils, worksheets

**Introduction:** Use Tearfund material to bring home the reality of poverty in our times.

1. The Psalter is brought to a close with a group of five psalms of praise, each beginning and ending with "Praise the Lord" (Hallelujah). The last psalm has every verse calling on us to praise God by every means available. The book of Psalms has covered many themes, exploring particularly man's need, both physical and spiritual, and God's provision, always timely and bountiful, proceeding from his faithful love for his people, designed by his infinite wisdom and delivered by his limitless power. Now it is time to close with praise issuing from hearts overflowing with gratitude for the past, peace for the present and confidence for the future. For the psalmist this is no mere momentary feeling but a determination to make praise a priority while there is breath in his body. (v2)
2. Before turning to God as our protector and provider verses 3 and 4 puts human pomp and power in its place. In the Hebrew "man" and "earth" are almost identical words, reminding us that man was formed from the dust of the earth even before sin entered the equation and man was condemned to "return to the earth" following the fall. There is a place for government but the plans of even the best princes, prime ministers and presidents are flawed and their plans perish with them. In reality, power in the hands of man usually corrupts them, encouraging them to cling on to power by whatever means and use it for their own comfort and advancement.
3. How different it is for the one whose help and whose hope is the Lord his God. (v5) Such a one is truly happy (a better word to use than "blessed"), knowing the "peace of God that passes all understanding", knowing God himself in a personal way, being able to turn to God at all times with the confidence of children going to their father, possessing a happiness that is deep and lasting and leaves no after taste of bitterness. Such happiness is mentioned twenty six times in the Psalter, starting with the first psalm. The theme is picked up again in the beatitudes in Matt.5.
4. This trust is in the God of Jacob, One who proved himself in the past to be an ever present help in time of need, who is the Creator of all things (v6), who keeps his promises and is especially mindful of the oppressed (v7). This trust is not wishful thinking nor superstitious belief in the face of the evidence. Those who trust God have never been let down.
5. Who are the people that matter in this world? Most would think of celebrities, people in positions of power and influence, people with material wealth etc. God thinks of those in need of help.
  - He offers justice to those oppressed by powerful and unscrupulous men. (v7)
  - He gives food to the hungry.(v7)
  - He gives liberty to the prisoner. (v7)
  - He gives sight to the blind.(v8)
  - He gives hope to the hopeless. (v8)

- He protects the helpless: strangers, widows, orphans. (v9)
  - He loves the righteous, those who keep their focus on him and follow his agenda. (v8)
6. Jesus in his teaching and actions was a true reflection of God's character, his nature in contact with real people. At the synagogue in Nazareth he claimed to fulfil the words of Isaiah 61 where the Messiah is portrayed as bringing relief to the poor, the downhearted and those held captive. (Luke 4:18) He also made reference to it in sending back a message to John the Baptist reminding him of healing miracles and preaching good news to the poor. (Luke 7:21,22).
7. Where Jesus showed he was a true Son of the Father in heaven so also all who claim to be children of God must show the same family likeness. The closing verses of Matthew 25 give a solemn picture of the vital importance of addressing the needs of those around us. Historically the Christian church has been at the forefront of humanitarian aid. There is still a lot to do.
8. This God, the God in covenant relationship with his people, is King. Human potentates may start off seeking the good of their people, but they don't keep it up, and at the best of times are unable to deliver even their limited and flawed agenda. Our God reigns to all generations. (v10) No wonder the psalmist cries, "Praise the Lord."

**Activities:** It is important to get the young folk talking about whom they see as the needy in the world today and how they could respond to that need. Complete the worksheets.

**LESSON 40 IS A CHALLENGE TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO REMEMBER THE YEAR'S MEMORY VERSES AND TO MAKE SOME APPLICATION OF THE LESSONS THEY HAVE LEARNED IN THEIR OWN LIVES.**