

True Prosperity



A Bible Study for the African Church

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With a project of this scope, it is difficult to remember all the people who contributed to its completion. However, at the risk of overlooking someone important, let me express the deepest gratitude of the Africa Baptist Theological Education Network (ABTEN) for those who labored to see this volume come to fruition.

First, we would like to thank the AB316 Writer's Guild for their vision, direction, and production of this work. When ABTEN was first launched in 2018, it was decided that we needed to form a writer's guild dedicated to addressing the theological issues in Africa and developing the next generation of African theologians and authors. This standing committee became AB316, and the first endeavor they launched was the *Abandoned Gospel Project*. The *Abandoned Gospel* book was published by AB316 in 2021, with promises to complete an orality curriculum and a discipleship curriculum in the same series. *True Prosperity: A Bible Study for the African Church* is the fulfillment of that promised discipleship curriculum.

Many in AB316 labored to see this curriculum developed, notably Phil Barnes. Phil was the first leader of the AB316 guild, and in addition to aiding the completion of the *Abandoned Gospel* book, he led the team as they developed the vision for *True Prosperity*. Since Phil departed Africa, Trevor Yoakum has led AB316 and is the one who artfully articulated the concept of human flourishing, biblical fidelity, and true prosperity. We would also like to thank Eric Lockhart, Bazil Bhasera, Matthews A. Ojo, Misheck Zulu, and Jack Rantho, who contributed many of the lessons to this work. From the beginning, the vision was that this would be a work by Africans for Africa, and these faithful brothers have made that vision a reality.

Finally, ABTEN and I would like to acknowledge the many editors, designers, peer reviewers, and spouses who labored tirelessly and anonymously to make this curriculum a reality. Our prayer as an organization is that God would use it to glorify himself and help his church become spiritually healthier and experience true biblical prosperity.

Dr. Kevin W. Rodgers
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INTRODUCTION

The message of the prosperity gospel is eagerly accepted in Africa. Africans are often ruled by their fears of the physical world and spiritual forces. They know sickness and death, lack and loss, and they have no power against these things. But even though the world they live in offers them little help and disappointing hope, they believe there is an antidote to their suffering, and they are willing to pay for it. The prosperity gospel scams them with a chance for a better life. That chance is proved by the wealth of the prosperity teachers who get rich off the donations of the desperate. People give so that God will give back to them.

Of course, this gospel sounds like the traditional religion of Africa with its incantations, spells, and giving to the spirits. In the traditional African culture, people can command the spirits, bribe the spirits, and get whatever they want. Or if they don't get what they want, their lack of prosperity rouses the condemning voices who claim their calamities are the result of their offenses. They must pay up.

But we want to offer them a better hope, the better gospel.

As pastors and church leaders, as seminary faculty and staff, we have seen the effects of the prosperity gospel, and we grieve over the eager acceptance of this false teaching in our communities. That's why we've written *True Prosperity: A Bible Study for the African Church*. Like Paul writing to the early churches, we want to equip the churches across Africa to recognize and refute the false teachers among them and to ground them in the Scripture so that they worship Jesus in Spirit and in truth.

In *True Prosperity*, we offer thirty Bible study lessons that counter the prosperity gospel by presenting the biblical idea of flourishing. In the Bible we find that God planned for us to flourish from the very beginning, and though we suffer now, we will flourish again. The gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that we are already in the process of flourishing, but we can expect to flourish in full when Jesus returns.

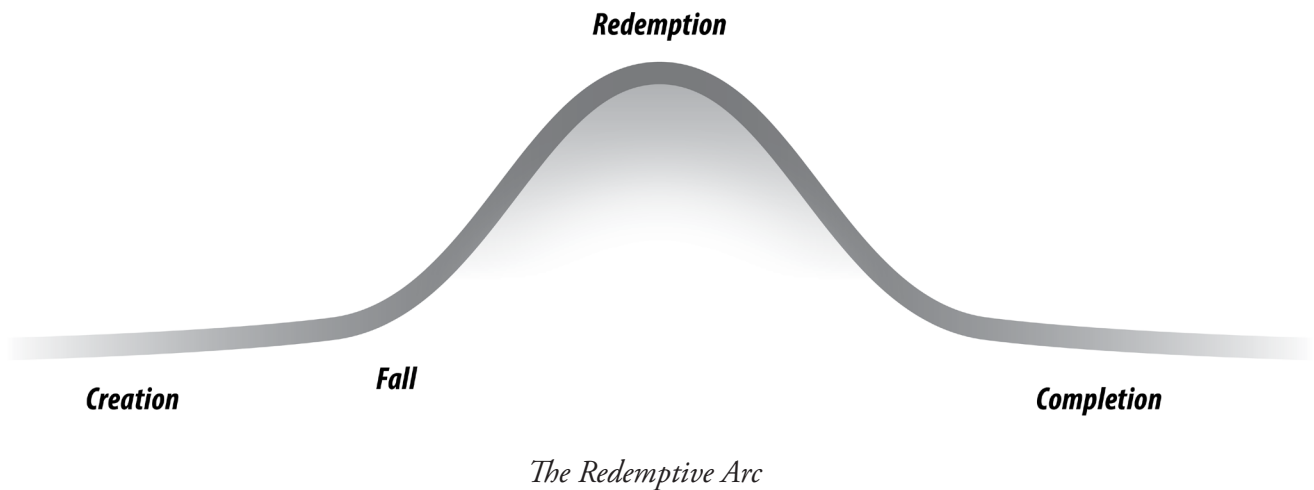
So instead of putting our hope in the false teaching of the prosperity gospel, we're eagerly awaiting Christ's return. We're waiting for God's kingdom to be revealed on earth as it is in heaven. We're waiting for our relationship with God to be fully restored. At that time, God will dwell among us again, and we will fully reflect his image throughout all of creation. We will truly flourish. And as we wait, as citizens of heaven, we are already receiving and participating in the restoration of God's kingdom, and we are already being

transformed into the image of Christ. We see glimpses of flourishing now, but in the age to come, we will fully flourish.

How to Use this Bible Study

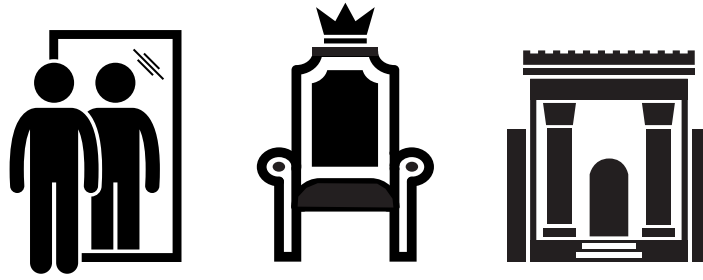
The Redemptive Arc

We've aligned the lessons in this book with what is known as the redemptive arc, the narrative storyline that God reveals to us throughout the Bible.



The lessons help us see how God is restoring what he originally intended at creation but was lost in the fall when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and all was cursed. To an extent, we have been restored through our redemption at the cross, but we still anticipate a culmination of this redemption when we will be resurrected and the heavens and the earth will be renewed in the age to come.

To help the participants visualize the arc and the redemptive storyline, you can give each person a blank copy of the redemptive arc without any words on it (Appendix 3), hang an enlarged blank copy of the redemptive arc where you can write on it and everyone can see it, or draw an arc that you can write on as you teach the lesson. As you progress through the lessons, you can write the title of each lesson in the corresponding section of the redemptive arc, which will help the participants understand how that topic relates to the historical trajectory of redemption. The more lessons you study together, the more this concept of the redemptive arc should encourage the participants to wait eagerly for Christ's return.



The Thesis and the Themes

We've also divided the lessons into three themes: the image of God, the kingdom of God, and the temple of God. Each theme leads us to a deeper understanding of biblical flourishing. These themes are represented by icons of a mirror, a throne, and a temple.

Along with the themes above, we've focused on a thesis statement and three main points about flourishing:

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Theme 1: The image of God

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Theme 2: The kingdom of God

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Theme 3: The temple of God

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

The Objectives

As you prepare to use the lessons in this book, you'll notice three objectives at the top of each lesson. The objectives focus on the participants' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. To express these three components of learning, we've used the triad "head, heart, hands" that was often taught by Dr. William Yount, a former professor of educational psychology and principles of teaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. (See Yount's book *Called to Teach: An Introduction to the Ministry of Teaching*.)

You'll also notice that the objectives begin with the clause, "I want the participant to." In a traditional lesson plan, the objective statements would usually begin with the clause "the learner will." We've purposely used "I want" because we want these objectives to become the cry of your heart. We've used "participants" because participants learn better than passive learners. This term also avoids creating a hierarchy that exalts the teacher over the student. Both are learners, and both are participants in learning. They learn from each other.



We recommend that you read the objectives far in advance of teaching the lesson so they can bear much fruit. First, you can use the objectives as prompts to help you pray for your class or small group. Expect God to work in their hearts and lives—and yours—before you meet. Second, the objectives may inspire you to enhance the material we've provided. Maybe you can introduce the lesson with an activity, a song, a story, or an illustration from your culture that addresses the main idea of the lesson and complements the objectives well. Stories, the arts, and the natural world are especially effective at reaching the heart, changing the mind, and motivating new behaviors.

The List of Responses

At the end of each lesson, we encourage the participants to consider how they can respond to the prosperity gospel in light of what they've just read in the Bible. To help with this activity, we've included a reproducible blank list (Appendix 5: What Can We Say?) where your group can write their answers to three questions: *What does the prosperity gospel say? What does the Bible say?* and *What can we say?* We've also provided a list of sample responses (Appendix 4), but we hope your group will think of their own responses that will apply better in your culture. By the end of the book, your group will have thirty statements they can use to counter the prosperity gospel in their minds, in their homes, and in their communities.

The First Lesson

Because the first lesson (The Redemptive Story) introduces the participants to the redemptive arc, the thesis and themes, and the list of responses to the prosperity gospel, it is the longest lesson. You may prefer to plan a party or a retreat where your church or your group can complete the introductory lesson together. Another option may be to plan four sermons about the four sections of the arc of redemption as they are presented in the first lesson. These sermons could introduce your church to the curriculum and encourage them to participate in the study.

True Prosperity

As the Africa Baptist Theological Network, we want to see your church and your community flourishing in true prosperity. We're praying that this Bible study will encourage you and mobilize you to lead others out of the trap of the prosperity gospel and into true prosperity. If you need more resources about this topic, consider two of our other books: *The Pearl of Great Worth: Finding True Prosperity*, a guidebook for teaching, telling, and translating thirty-five Bible stories for adults that help you communicate biblical prosperity, and *The Abandoned Gospel: The Prosperity Gospel Among Neo-Pentecostals in Africa*, a collection of academic essays about this problem on our continent.

We look forward to the day when your people will no longer suffer, the earth beneath your feet will be renewed, God's kingdom and our relationship with him will be fully restored, and he will dwell among us again. Then we will know complete redemption. Until then, thank you for letting us walk with you.

The ABTEN Team
www.abten.org

INTRODUCTORY LESSON

The Redemptive Story

Main Idea: The whole Bible tells the story of redemption, and we are still in the middle of it.

Scripture Passages: Genesis 1:26; 3:1–24; Romans 5:12, 17; John 3:1–8, 16–17; Romans 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 5:1–5; 1 John 3:2

Scripture Focus: 1 John 3:2

OBJECTIVES



Head – I want participants to know the redemptive story that runs through the whole Bible.



Heart – I want participants to hope for their ultimate future with God in eternity.

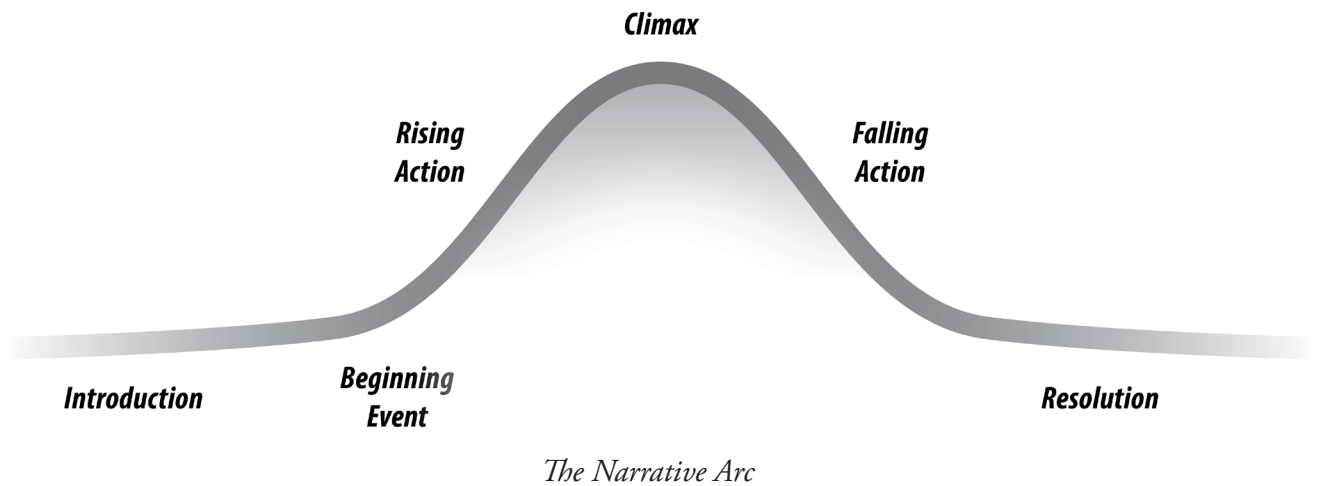


Hands – I want participants to place themselves in the storyline of the Bible.

Before you begin this lesson, you can hang an enlarged copy of the redemptive arc (Appendix 1) where everyone can see it, or draw an arc that you can write on as you teach the lesson.

DISCUSSION

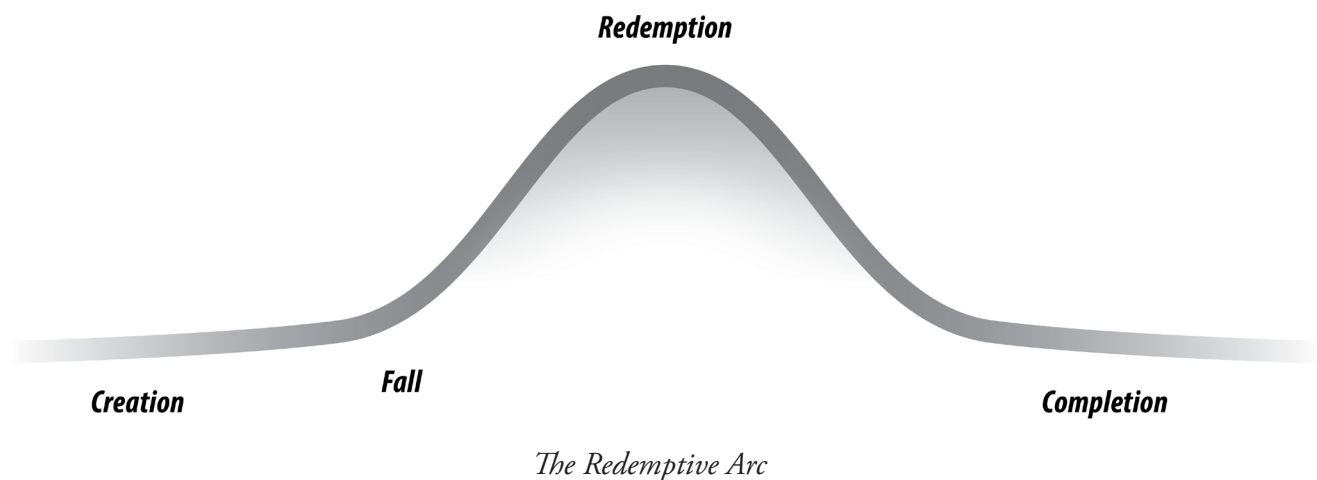
Stories typically follow a narrative arc: an introduction, a beginning event (a conflict), rising action, the climax, falling action, and the resolution.



If you were telling the story of Nelson Mandela or one of your heroes, what might be the introduction, beginning event, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution in the story?

The Bible also has a narrative arc. Though the Bible consists of sixty-six books filled with numerous stories and rich literature from multiple genres, it has one storyline that God has told from the beginning to the end. And we are living in the middle of that story. In fact, we could say God has told this story from before time began, throughout all of history, and on through eternity. Because of his grace, he has revealed the storyline to us in the Bible.

As you read today's Bible passages, see if you can recognize the four acts or plot movements of the narrative arc in the Bible: (Act 1) Creation, (Act 2) Fall, (Act 3) Redemption, and (Act 4) Completion. We call this the redemptive arc.



Let's take a closer look. [*Read Genesis 1:26 and 3:1–24 together.*]

The biblical story of redemption starts in Genesis 1–2 with the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them. We call this *creation*. In these first two chapters, we see how God

designed humans and the world to reflect him and his glory. Humans, the high point of God's creation, were made in his very image. God gave them the responsibility to care for and rule over all of creation.

Write or point to the first act of the redemptive narrative (Creation) on the redemptive arc.

But as soon as we glimpse God's glory in creation, we see the first humans rebel against God in Genesis 3. They sinned, and the result of sin was that humans and all of God's creation were cursed. We call this event the *fall* because it was at this point that humankind and all of creation fell short of God's glory and who he designed us to be. We changed kingdoms, from God's kingdom to our own. And when our relationship with God broke, everything broke. Everything started dying.

Write or point to the second act of the redemptive narrative (Fall) on the redemptive arc.

But God loved us so much that he didn't let the story end there. God promised he would send someone to restore everything that had been broken by sin and the curse. For pages and pages and pages, we read the story of how God repaired what had been broken. He did this by sacrificing his only son to pay the price for our destructive sin. But Jesus didn't stay dead. God brought him back to life. Through Jesus's resurrection, he conquered death and restored our relationship with God and his creation. We call this *redemption*. Redemption opened the door for us to return to God's kingdom and become who he designed us to be.

Write or point to the third act of the redemptive narrative (Redemption) on the redemptive arc.

Let's read about redemption in the Bible. [Read Romans 5:12, 17 and John 3:1–8, 16–17.]

All along, but especially in the final chapters of Revelation, we find glimmers of what is coming next—a new creation that reveals God's glory in its fullness. This new creation will look much like the original creation, where God reigns and dwells with us and we reflect his image perfectly again. We call this *completion*.

Write or point to the fourth act of the redemptive narrative (Completion) on the redemptive arc.

But we are not complete yet. In this present age, we still suffer the pangs of death and the curse. Because work is hard, we neglect our divine duty to care for God's creation. We reflect a broken image of him. We cause injustice and we suffer injustice. Our health declines. We die. Everything around us is dying. So we hope for new life.

Let's read how the New Testament describes us as we wait for complete restoration. [*Read Romans 8:18–25; 2 Corinthians 5:1–5; and 1 John 3:2.*]

Like Jesus, our Redeemer who died and rose again, we will live again. In the meantime, we are steadily being transformed into his image. And when Christ returns and we are raised to life again with him, we will be like him. We will reign together with Christ on the new earth. As citizens of God's kingdom, we wait eagerly for this day.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Prosperity teachers claim that we can be completely restored now. They say we only have to claim the authority and the power to live in victory over all hardship. They teach that we have power to make our sickness, pain, and poverty disappear. This teaching leads many people to chase after health and wealth, prosperity and power.

How do we truly flourish?

Though Christians indeed have victory through Christ, we have only a deposit of what is to come. In the future, God will put all things under subjection to Christ. When that time comes, all the hardship that we face will disappear. But the Bible says we are still waiting for the completion of our restoration and Christ's dominion over all things.

After the resurrection of those who are in Christ, comes the *telos*—the end. The word *telos* has the sense of completion or fulfillment. In the New Testament, it speaks of when God will complete his redemptive purposes. It speaks of a time when God will unveil creation as he intended it, not as the fall made it.

God's image in us is currently corrupted by sin and death, but it will be restored. Christ will make all things new. He will right what has been wrong. Christ will be victorious over every enemy. The promise is not that we will have full dominion now, as the prosperity gospel preachers proclaim. The promise is that all of creation will be restored to what God intended.

And on that day, we will know God as we are known. As the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, we see dimly now, but then we will see face to face. Understanding the image of God is somehow difficult for us now, but it will not be on that day.

He will receive the glory. We will be his stewards, made in his image, glorifying and praising the one who has vanquished every enemy. What a glorious day that will be!

What else will we learn together?

As we study the Bible together in the lessons that follow, we'll focus on one thesis and three themes from the Bible.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Theme 1: The image of God

Main Point: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Theme 2: The kingdom of God

Main Point: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Theme 3: The temple of God

Main Point: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

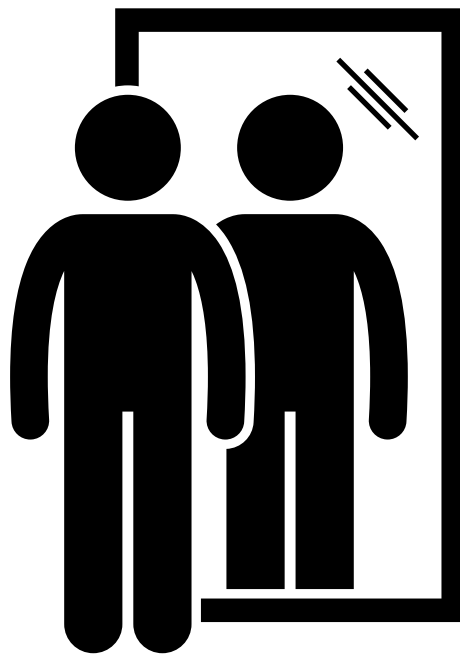
The lessons in this study are divided into these three themes. At the beginning of each lesson, we'll write the title of the lesson on the redemptive arc. The more we study together, the more we'll see the redemptive storyline emerge, and the more we'll understand God's message to us through these three themes. Ultimately, we'll hope for more than this life and this world can give us.

At the end of each lesson, we'll prepare to share that hope with other people. We'll make a three-column list where we write down what the prosperity teachers say, what God has said in the Bible, and what we can say in response to the false teachings. When we finish the last lesson, we'll have a list of truthful and loving responses to the prosperity gospel and those who believe it. We will be able to share a better gospel with them.

So how should we live today?

1. What are the four acts of the redemptive arc in the Bible? Which act are we in today?
2. What is a difference between the prosperity gospel and what we read in the Bible today?
3. When you look at the thesis and the three themes we'll study together, which one are you most looking forward to learning more about?

The Image of God



**We flourish when we increasingly reflect
God's image in all of creation.**

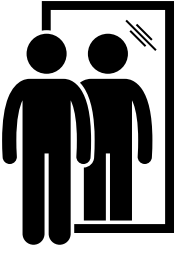


IMAGE OF GOD CREATION

1

We Flourish When We Care for Creation

Main Idea: We are God's image-bearers, so we flourish when we care for creation on his behalf.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 1

Scripture Focus: Genesis 1:26-28

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that our role in creation is to be the caretakers because we bear the image or likeness of God.



Heart - I want participants to feel honored to be God's stewards, caring for creation under his authority.



Hands - I want participants to act like caretakers, not gods.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

As you begin this lesson, you can give each person a blank copy of the redemptive arc with the mirror icon at the top (Appendix 3), hang an enlarged blank copy of the redemptive arc where you can write on it and everyone can see it, or draw an arc that you can write on as you teach the lesson. Write this lesson's title in the Creation section next to the number 1.

DISCUSSION

What does it mean when the Bible says that God created human-kind in the “image of God?” Does it mean that God has arms, legs, fingers, and toes? Or does the Bible mean something deeper than mere physical appearance? [*Invite discussion*]

How does our culture deny that we are made in God’s image? [*Invite discussion*]

In the 1970s, archeologists discovered a statue from around 850 B.C. (or possibly 1100 B.C.) in modern-day Syria with an inscription written in both Aramaic and Akkadian. The inscription describes the king of the time as the “image” (Hebrew: *tselem*) and “likeness” (Hebrew: *delûth*) of his god. Other ancient Akkadian texts use similar wording: “the father of the king, my lord, was the very image of the god Bel, and the king, my lord, is likewise the very image of Bel.”

These examples show us that in biblical times people believed their kings ruled as the “image” and “likeness” of their pagan gods. Their rulership and authority were described as similar to that of their gods. The Bible uses this idea that was common in ancient times but says something different about it. Genesis tells us God created, not just kings and earthly rulers, but all human beings in his image and likeness.

Let’s take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

A closer look at Genesis 1:26–28 will give us some clues about what it means for humans to be created in God’s image. First, human beings, male and female, are to exercise dominion over all the earth—including the animals, the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field. Second, exercising dominion over the earth does not mean human beings can do anything that they like to the planet. We are seeking to be caretakers of it and to add value to it. God gave men and women specific instructions: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” So human beings exercise their dominion by following God’s instructions to them. If we follow what God commands, our authority over the earth that we received from God will be of benefit to all. Perhaps a better way to describe our authority for today would be *stewardship*.

When we use the word *steward*, we are referring to someone who manages, oversees, or cares for the property or possessions of another. Biblically, we see this in Genesis 1, as we are called to care for God’s world. We also find stewardship mentioned throughout Scripture in areas such as finances, spiritual gifts, and even our time and lives. Stewardship reminds us that God is the owner and authority. We are only the managers. We, human beings, are given that privilege. We, out of all creation, are the ones chosen to be

God's stewards because we, out of all creation, are the ones made in God's image and likeness.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Unfortunately, prosperity theology tends to have a low view of the image of God. Its teachers don't see the honor in being a manager or servant of God. They desire to be gods themselves. They claim that being made in the image of God means that they are little gods. A prosperity preacher, Kenneth Copeland, once preached a sermon from several passages in the Gospel of John in which Jesus says of himself, "I AM," a reference to Exodus in which God tells Moses that his name is "I AM." Copeland then replies, "As I read this passage, I think, 'So am I.'"

How do we truly flourish?

Copeland's message is not at all what is meant by the phrase *in the image of God*. It may be what the pagan world would understand, but it is not a Christian belief. We do not have the same authority and rulership as God. We are under him. But, by his grace, he has placed us over the rest of creation. We are the highlight of his creation. We are not all that he created. But we are uniquely blessed to care for his creation because we were made in his image and likeness—for his glory.

The Bible says that we are not gods. Rather, we are caretakers or stewards, entrusted by God to tend his creation according to his directions and rules. If we disregard God's law and rule of creation so that we can live according to our own human wishes, sin multiplies, human suffering increases, and culture declines.

Give each person a blank copy of the three-column list of responses to the prosperity gospel (Appendix 5: What Can We Say?) or be ready to write the responses where the whole group can read them. Label the three columns with these titles: Prosperity Teachers Say, The Bible Says, and We Can Say. Then ask the participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What is our role in creation as people created in the image of God?
2. What are some ways that we can think too highly of ourselves as beings created in the "image and likeness" of God?
3. What would you tell a prosperity teacher or someone who follows them when they say we can be little gods who command spiritual forces to give us power over creation?

4. What are some good examples you've seen of people caring for what God has created? How can you follow these examples?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

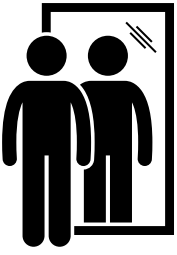


IMAGE OF GOD CREATION

2

We Flourish When We Work

Main Idea: We are God's image-bearers, so we flourish when we work.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that as people made in God's image, we are designed to work.



Heart - I want participants to feel motivated to work for God's glory.



Hands - I want participants to roll up their sleeves and work.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Creation section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 2 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

What do you enjoy about the work you do? What do you think God thinks about the work you do? *[Invite discussion]*

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passages together.]*

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they suffered from the consequences. Their relationship with God was broken, and the

way they revealed his image was distorted. Their character, affected by both spiritual and physical death, changed. Even the way they exercised their authority and dominion over the creation changed. The penalty for their sin was that God cursed them and the ground (Gen 3:17).

When God created Adam in his own image and put him in the Garden of Eden, he gave Adam instructions, telling him what to do and what not to do. Genesis 2:15 explains that part of God's design and plan for humans includes work. God has not created us to be idle, and work is never a curse upon us but a divine plan of God for us to be blessed and to live a fulfilled life. Again, work is not a curse. Work is part of God's design. However, the toil and struggle of work is a result of the curse that was given due to the Fall.

What does this mean to us? It reminds us that work is good. We should aim to work, even as our God is always at work. Also, people need to understand the divine expectation behind their secular jobs or work. God's intention is that through our work the name of God will be glorified (1 Cor 10:31). Every child of God needs to understand that his or her job or work is given to serve a divine purpose. Every job and all work should be directed toward expansion of the kingdom of God and the benefit of humankind. Furthermore, work is the means through which God intends to bless physically and financially.

Children of God are to develop a proper and correct attitude and understanding of work—that their work or jobs are given by God and must be carried out in God's own way so that the name of God will be glorified. In saying this, we also want to emphasize that all work is a ministry. Every Christian is involved in ministry. Our work is a way that we glorify God and minister to others. There is a famous story of the Reformer Martin Luther being approached by a cobbler who had recently become a Christian and wanted to know if he should continue in his profession. Luther told him to continue and stated: "Make a quality shoe and share it at a fair price." He added these words, "The same is true for shoemaker, tailor, scribe, or reader. If he is a Christian tailor, he will say: I make these clothes because God has bidden me do so, so that I can earn a living, so that I can help and serve my neighbor." Luther's point is that your work, whatever it may be, is your ministry. It is the way God provides for you and allows you to provide for others.

What do the Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Throughout the ages, people have desired a path that leads to flourishing, and many have been misled by various prosperity preachers and teachers to believe that the way God blesses

people has no connection with their work. Neo-Pentecostals often preach about miraculous financial and material abundance without linking this abundance to work or labor. Their false enthusiasm has led to a parade of people who do not want to work but still want to have the best in life.

Some prosperity preachers insist that the more people give to the church or to any endeavor within the church, the more blessings they will receive from God. These teachings deviate from the Scriptural teaching about work and God's blessings.

God's blessings have not always been in terms of financial buoyancy and material acquisition. Emotional stability, contentment, continual spiritual growth, impact on people and society, etc. are also elements of prosperity. But Neo-Pentecostal prosperity preachers often downplay these elements. Their neglect of other aspects of prosperity has misled some Christians toward materialism and greed.

Furthermore, prosperity preachers do not teach about the dangers of the preoccupation with wealth. After Jesus told the rich man to sell his possessions and give to the poor, the man walked away sad (Luke 18:18-25). Jesus cautioned that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

How do we truly flourish?

Our dreams of a flourishing life and a flourishing society must be established on a biblical theology and culture of work. The following basic truths should be understood about the biblical perspective of work:

1. Work is not a result of sin, and it is not a curse for humankind, rather it is a divine plan for us to fully be what God intended us to be.
2. Work is not a result of humanity's fall from God's glory, but it is made harder because of the fall.
3. Work is more than a way to make money, because work is valuable in itself.
4. It is unbiblical to expect God's blessings in the complete absence of human work.
5. The ministerial calling is not higher than other professions. Every vocation is great if greatly pursued.
6. We are all called to glorify God through our work.
7. Work looks different for people of different abilities. God has purposely designed each person to display his glory in them and through their work.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. Did God give Adam and Eve a job before or after they sinned and creation was cursed? What does that tell us about work?
2. How do the Bible's teachings about work differ from the prosperity teachers' and Neo-Pentecostal preachers'?
3. What are your personal work habits and work ethic? Are they honoring to God? If not, what can you change?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

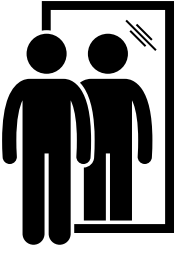


IMAGE OF GOD

FALL

3

God Wants a Relationship with Us

Main Idea: God created us in his image so we can have a relationship with him.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 3

Scripture Focus: Genesis 3:8

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that because of Jesus's death and resurrection, they can have a relationship with God.



Heart - I want participants to feel loved and sought after. I want participants to repent and seek a relationship with God through Jesus.



Hands - I want participants to invite other people into a relationship with God through Jesus.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Fall section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 3 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt that your relationship with God was broken?
[*Invite discussion*]

Have you ever felt too guilty to confess your sins to God? [*Invite discussion*]

In the Genesis account of creation, only humans are made in God's image. Because of this special nature of humankind, we are the highest of God's creation. As the image of God, we are also given the opportunity to enter into a relationship with God and enjoy his awesome presence.

But immediately after the creation story, is the account of how Adam and Eve disobeyed God and then hid from him. We see their separation from God and each other. God intended for people to be in a special relationship with him. He designed humans for this relationship, but sin separates us from God. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, humans could no longer withstand the presence of God nor enjoy his awesome presence.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Notice that Genesis 3:8 teaches us that it was indeed Adam who hid. God came looking for Adam. Sometimes we hear people say that God cannot be around sin, but perhaps it is better to say that sin cannot be around God. God does not hide from the sinner. The sinner hides from God. God comes looking for the sinner. It is Adam who feels shame and needs to hide. What a sad picture!

The Bible says that Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden. That means they recognized the sound because they had heard it before. It is stated as though it was common for God to come and walk with them. They were in fellowship with God. But after their disobedience, when God came to walk with them, Adam hid. The fellowship was broken. They were separated. God drove them from the garden, and they no longer had access to paradise and intimate fellowship with God. Sadly, humankind continues in that separation. That's the bad news. But there is good news!

God could have left us separated, but he didn't! He came looking for Adam, and he came with a plan. Immediately, God told Adam the plan to restore the relationship. In Genesis 3:15 God mentioned the gospel for the first time. The woman's seed (Christ) would have his heel bruised by the serpent (Satan), but he (Christ) would crush the head of the serpent (Satan). Christ defeated Satan, sin, and death, and in doing so, he restored his relationship with all who put their trust in him.

Throughout Scripture, we see God's desire to be with his people (Lev 26:11-12). When the Israelites were in the desert, God dwelt with them in a tent (Exod 27:21; 40:34-38). When they were later established in the promised land, God dwelt with them in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). In the New Testament, Jesus lived among us (John 1:14). He is Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt 1:21-23). Now, we have become temples of God where we are not only in God's presence, but his Holy Spirit is always with us (1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:20-22; 1 Pet 2:5).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

For many Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers and preachers, the incentive for having a relationship with God is the hope for material blessings. They give the wrong impression that a relationship with God is confirmed through physical well-being. They ignore the necessity of repentance and reconciliation and therefore diminish the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In their theology, the grace of God is an umbrella under which people can hide their sins.

How do we truly flourish?

But sin is still as dangerous as it was to Adam and Eve. Every child of God must run away from sin. The apostle Paul also emphasized this: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:1-2 ESV).

Salvation does not offer man the opportunity to play around with sin. Rather, it gives grace to live victoriously above sin. Children of God are expected to do away with sin and embrace the lifestyle of holiness and righteousness that sustain their salvation experience.

This salvation is secure because our relationship with God is restored through Christ. Notice that it is not restored by works. Nor is it restored by giving more money. It is restored only through faith in Jesus Christ, his death, burial, and resurrection. How great a God that he comes looking for the sinner and makes a way to restore us to fellowship with himself!

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. Have you ever hidden from God? Can you tell us about it?
2. What are some ways you've tried to restore your relationship with God in your own power?
3. What is the only way for a relationship with God to be restored?
4. Do you have friends or family members who have not yet repented of their sins? What is the consequence if these people never repent?
5. Are you trying to hide any sins right now? Do you need to confess anything and repent?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

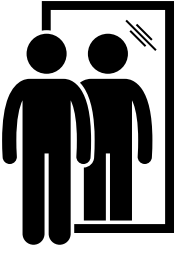


IMAGE OF GOD CREATION

4

All Power and Authority Belong to Christ

Main Idea: All power and authority belong to Christ.

Scripture Passage: Ephesians 1

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 1:20-23

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that Jesus is seated above all other rulers, authorities, powers, dominions, and titles.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled that they are the body of Christ, through whom he fulfills his reign in the world.



Hands - I want participants to worship Jesus.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 4 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

Do you believe in the spirit world? Who do you think rules the spirit world? [*Invite discussion*]

The city of Ephesus was a political and commercial center in what is now western Turkey. Religiously, it was the center of worship of the goddess Artemis (also known as Diana). Magical practices also abounded in Ephesus. Additionally, there was a temple for worship of the emperor at Ephesus. The moral life was a problem too. There was a large brothel at one of the major intersections.

Paul wrote a letter to the new Christians in Ephesus while he was in prison. His basic message in this letter was that Christ has redeemed, reconciled, and forgiven his church, and, as a result, his church ought to live lives of holiness before God and other people so they can bear witness to God's amazing grace.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

In this first chapter of his letter, Paul told the Ephesian church how he prayed for them. He prayed that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Christ. He prayed that they would truly know the strength that was available to them when they believed. He prayed these things because he wanted them to persevere in the faith that they had received.

So it was in this context of knowing Christ and persevering in the faith (even in a city like Ephesus) that Paul wrote about power in verses 20-23. The power to persevere was not in themselves. The power to persevere was in Christ. That power is only available to us because of the image of God in Christ.

Let's look at our focus passage verse by verse.

Verse 20 says that he (God) exerted his power by raising Jesus from the dead *and* seating him at his right hand. So let's see how these two actions demonstrate the power of God.

First, Jesus's perfect, sinless life was validated when God raised him from the dead. God was saying, "This man did not deserve to die. The rest of creation—including all of humankind—deserves to die, but this man did not." So God validated Christ's perfect life by raising him from the dead. Also in verse 20, God's power was exercised by seating Christ at God's right hand. This idea of being seated at God's right hand demonstrates two things. First, Christ is seated (as opposed to standing). This position is a position of finished work. Remember that Christ cried, "It is finished!" from the cross. His redeeming work was finished on the cross. As the book of Hebrews confirms, no more sacrifices need to be made. Christ made a once-for-all-time sacrifice.

Second, being seated at the Father's right hand demonstrates that Christ—the Son of God—has a position of authority over all things. We see this more explicitly in the next verse.

In verse 21, in addition to demonstrating that Christ has power now, Paul also demonstrates that Christ's power is in "the age to come." So we see that Christ, as the perfect image of God, will rule for eternity—not just now.

The first part of verse 22 quotes Psalm 8:6. When we look at that Psalm, we see that it is a song of praise. Specifically, it is identified as a creation hymn—a song that praises God as Creator. So we know that Jesus is being presented as the second Adam—the last Adam. Where the first Adam failed, the second Adam succeeded! The first Adam gave in to temptation and fell into sin. This failure ushered death into the world. Christ, as the second Adam, did not fail the way that the first Adam did in Genesis 3. Instead, this second Adam overcame temptation and conquered sin and death!

The second half of verse 22 connects God's work through Christ to the church. Christ is head of the church. By giving us the image of Christ as the head, we see that the body is a necessary part of God's work in the world. Verse 23 picks up the discussion about the church by calling the church "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (NIV).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Contrast the teaching in these verses with the false teaching among some prosperity teachers that we can become little gods. These verses teach that Jesus is God. They teach that his perfect life is distinctly different from any life that anyone has lived before or since. Christ's status as seated at the right hand of the Father also points to Christ's unique status and position of authority.

Christ rules over all powers. We do not. Contrary to some false teachers' teaching, we cannot instruct God. Some false teachers say that God has the power but we Christians have the authority, and that God cannot act unless we give him the authority. These verses clearly contradict that false teaching. God has the power. Christ has ALL authority. If and when God heals, delivers, and empowers, it is according to his sovereign authority and his unlimited power.

But sometimes false teachers twist these verses to say that they (the false teachers) will do "greater works" than Jesus. (They supposedly appeal to John 14:12). According to these false teachers, the idea of doing "greater works" means that they will perform more miracles than Jesus performed. However, upon closer examination, these verses (along with John 14:12 and Col 1:24) are not teaching that the work done by the church will be greater

in that sense. Instead, it seems that these passages are teaching that the body of Christ (the church) will fill the entire earth with the message that Jesus is King—that the gospel is the only remedy to our sin problem. All the miracles that Jesus performed were signs pointing to himself as the promised Messiah. The signs were signs pointing to a greater truth—not works to be used to exploit others.

How do we truly flourish?

This passage is about the power of God. God’s power is revealed in raising Jesus from the dead, and that power is also present in Christ. God’s power is proven in the past (through the resurrection of Jesus), in the present (through the current ruling of Christ over all things), and in the future (through his ruling over “the age to come”). The power belongs to Christ. He rules over all. To him belongs all power, all dominion, and all glory.

Finally, God’s power is demonstrated in the fact that Christ rules through his church. In his rule through his church, some of the “image of God” that Adam had lost in the fall is now restored in this age. In the age to come, it will surpass even what Adam and Eve enjoyed in the garden. All the power of Christ mentioned above is due to the reality that Jesus Christ is the only perfect image of God (Col 1:15). And the church is in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. How does Jesus’s resurrection reveal his supreme power over all other rulers, authorities, powers, dominions, and titles?
2. How would you respond to Jesus if you saw him seated at the right hand of the Father “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” (Eph 1:21 NIV)?
3. Name one way God can reveal the fullness of Christ to your community through your church?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

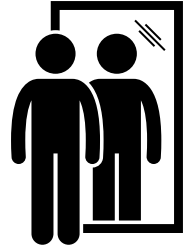
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5

Jesus Is the Image of Our Reconciling God

Main Idea: Jesus is God's Son, the perfect image of the invisible God reconciling all of creation.

Scripture Passage: Colossians 1

Scripture Focus: Colossians 1:15-23

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that the perfect image of God is fully visible in Christ, his Son.



Heart - I want participants to feel secure in Christ's reconciling them to God.



Hands - I want participants to worship Jesus as the perfect image of God, reconciling all things on earth and in heaven. And I want them to share this good news with others.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 5 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

What does reconciliation look like in your home, your church, your community, or your nation? Can you give an example?

[Invite discussion]

Can we talk directly to God? Why do we get to go before the throne of God? *[Invite discussion]*

Paul had never visited the Colossian church, and the believers there had never seen him face to face. Still, the pastor asked Paul for counsel and advice on how to handle the false teaching that had seeped into the church. Paul could not visit them because he was in prison, but he could write to them and counsel them against the false teachings that were threatening the witness of the church.

The false teaching appeared through a blend of Jewish and Greek elements. We call this type of blending of different religious ideas *syncretism*. It is seen when we mix godly truths with pagan lies. It seems the Colossians believed that Christians needed to find a way to protect themselves against spiritual forces, so they created an extreme form of self-discipline. The people were told to abstain from food and drink and to honor certain days prescribed in the Old Testament. This heresy also led to the belief that angelic beings served as mediators between God and the world.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passage together.]*

The response of the apostle Paul to the false teaching was to teach a proper understanding about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul sought to help the Colossians understand that the only mediator they needed was Jesus. Christ is the only one necessary to gain acceptance before God. He is not a mediator. He is *the* mediator. There is no other.

Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the mediator because he is the image of God and the firstborn of all creation. No one else can make that claim.

When you hear the phrase, "the image of God," you likely think about Genesis 1. When God made human beings, he made them in the image of God. Hearing the phrase may make us think of a mirror. When we look in the mirror, we see an image. It is not us in the mirror, but a reflection of us that is seen in the mirror. When God created us, he made human beings as reflections of himself.

Of course, with the fall, the image of God in human beings was marred. It was not lost but blurred. Sin has corrupted every aspect of creation, including the image of God. However, this is not the case with Christ. Not only is Christ sinless, but he is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity.

Christ always has been and always will be the image of God. The term *image* expresses the idea that, in Christ, the nature and being of God are perfectly revealed. Thus, he is the pre-existent one who has fully and clearly revealed the character and nature of God. God, who is invisible, has been seen (or known) in Christ.

Similarly, the description “firstborn of all creation” is not meant to denote that Christ was the first thing to be created. Rather, it indicates that he is the one by whom and through whom all creation came into being. It is frequently used in genealogies and historical narratives to indicate the supremacy of someone—the one who has a special place of rank in the father’s love. In other words, it serves as a title of distinction. We may immediately recall that it is the firstborn who receives the inheritance of the Father. The preeminence of the Son over all of creation is seen in this title. He existed before all creation, and he is the supreme being of the universe. He has power over all things. He not only created all things, but he holds all things together, and because the fullness of God dwells in him, he was able to reconcile all things to himself. He redeems his people. He redeems creation. He stands between God and man as the mediator worthy to make reconciliation. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, our sin has been atoned for and we have been redeemed. As he cleans us up, he restores the image of God, as we become more like Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Those who preach the prosperity gospel often neglect the reconciling work of Jesus through his death on the cross and the salvation he has brought us. They emphasize, rather, that Christ’s death primarily guarantees believers physical health, freedom from demonic powers, abundance in finances, material acquisition, etc. It is frightening to hear how prosperity teaching has reduced our Savior to a provider of earthly blessings to address human physical needs. This teaching neglects Christ’s fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan and his work that revoked the power of sin and reconciled humans to God. Prosperity theology diverts attention from our need for redemption. Indeed, prosperity preachers neglect the ministry of reconciliation, which God has provided in Jesus Christ, and which has been entrusted to believers (2 Cor 18-20). Overall, their teaching misrepresents the image of our reconciling God and his Son, Jesus Christ.

How do we truly flourish?

As we come to realize who Jesus actually is, though, we come to learn that he is the blessing we need. We are not using God to get wealth, health, and fame. We worship Jesus because he is God. We did not need Jesus to die for our wealth, physical health, or

prosperity. We needed a mediator who could come between God and us and redeem us of our sin. We needed one who could restore the image of God, not to restore our own desires. God is interested in redeeming our status before him—conforming us to the image of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. Specifically, we are being conformed to the image of Christ in his character—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What are some things we know about God because of what we've seen in Jesus?
God is _____ (noun or adjective)_____.
God _____ (verb)_____.
2. Who are some people, spirits, or things we have turned to in hopes that they would be mediators between us and God?
3. Because Jesus has reconciled us to God, what are some things we no longer need to fear?
4. What is your response to Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross so that you and everything on earth and in heaven could be reconciled to God?
5. Who else needs to know that God has reconciled us to himself through Christ?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

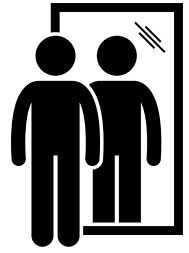
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6

We Are Being Transformed into the Image of Christ

Main Idea: Like a veil, sin separates us from God's glory, but Christ has removed the veil so we can behold God, and the Spirit is transforming us into his glory.

Scripture Passages: Exodus 34:29-35; 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Scripture Focus: 2 Corinthians 3:18

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that sin separates us from God's glory, but Christ has made a way for us to behold him.



Heart - I want participants to yearn for the day when Christ returns and we are all transformed into his image.



Hands - I want participants to turn away from their sin and turn toward Christ.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 6 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever needed something or someone to help you see something more clearly? What helped you? [*Invite discussion*]

Have you ever thought you understood something, only to realize later that you hadn't understood it at all? Why didn't you understand at first? Why were you able to understand later? [*Invite discussion*]

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he refers to the story of Moses in Exodus 34. In that passage, after Moses had met with God, his face shined so brightly that he had to wear a veil whenever he was in front of the Israelites because the glory of God was unbearable to the people. At that time the Israelites were hardened in their hearts, so that they found it difficult to obey God. Their sin stopped them from experiencing the full glory of God, and similarly, sin can play the same part in our lives. Just as the presence of sin in their lives created a chasm between them and God, it does with us. But there is hope.

Paul referred to this story about Moses's veil when he wrote to the Corinthians about how the veil that separates us from God's glory has been removed.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passages together.*]

Some people in the Corinthian church believed they could see God's glory by following the law. But the veil is there because of unbelief. Therefore, it cannot be removed by our attempts to purify ourselves by works or following the law. Paul wrote to help the church see that only through faith in Jesus can we behold God's glory.

A statement like that always causes us to ask, *But what about works?* There is a place for works. Works come as a result of our faith. Works do not produce faith. We do not become conformed to Christ by doing better, but by trusting him more. Our pursuit to become conformed to his likeness is better understood as our willingness to let Christ change us, not by our own works, but by his spirit. Our liberty, or freedom from the power of sin that hinders us from seeing his glory and thus being transformed, comes from and is the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17).

Paul says that once we understand that we need Christ to rescue us from the condemnation of the law, this moment of spiritual revelation is followed by spiritual transformation. When the veil is removed from our faces and we put our faith in Christ, we can boldly look at Christ, who is the glory of God. We can now see him and recognize his worthiness to be worshiped because of who he is and the beauty of his glory. We are thus conformed into the

image of Christ by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in us every day. Though the ministry of the law brought death, grace through the spirit brings life.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

This is not how Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel preachers teach about transformation. Prosperity teachers tend to use this particular verse to emphasize that we are, or should be, full of God's radiant glory. A prominent prosperity teacher wrote a Facebook post based on 2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

You ought to let the God-life reflect in everything about you, including the way you dress and look. You're the King's kid; don't look dull and uninteresting! When you get up in the morning, before you head out, look into the mirror, point at your reflection and tell him/her: "You're a bundle of success happening everywhere you go! You're on an upward and forward journey of success!"

To make matters worse, the comments and reactions to this teaching demonstrated that people were excited to hear it. They embraced this false teaching. Yet, several characteristics of this message should have raised some concerns:

- There is no mention of sin and how it hinders us from seeing God or of our need for redemption.
- There is an emphasis on glory ascribed to humans instead of to God (i.e., you are good and sufficient on your own).
- There is also the idea within this message that being conformed to the image of God's glory means being successful in earthly things.

How do we truly flourish?

The Bible teaches that sin hinders us. It veils us from seeing God. The glory of God is too much for sinful man. Even Moses's reflection of God's glory was too much for the Israelites. Their need to turn away from God's glory shining in Moses's face demonstrates the separation between man and God. But Christ has come. Christ has conquered. And the veil has been removed—not because of our work, but because of Christ's work.

We are being transformed. We are not there yet, but we are in the process. We are being made into the image of Christ and being restored to what God designed us to be because Jesus Christ died for our sin and rose again from the grave, lifting the veil that hid the glory of God.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What are some things that prevent us from seeing God's glory? What is the solution?
2. Tell us about a time you've seen a glimpse of God's glory? Has the Holy Spirit used this revelation to change you? How?
3. What are some ways you've seen people try to fake God's glory?
4. What do you think will happen when we see God's glory fully?

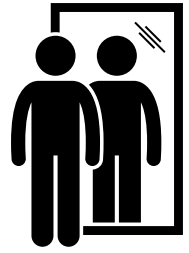
*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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7

We Will Bear the Image of Christ Fully When We Are Resurrected — Part 1

Main Idea: Because Christ has been raised from the dead, our hope is valid beyond this life.

Scripture Passages: 1 Corinthians 15:1-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Philippians 3:18-21

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 15:19

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know their salvation is secure because Christ rose from the dead.



Heart - I want participants to hope for eternity with God and have compassion for those with false hopes.



Hands - I want participants to respond with compassionate truth to people with false hopes.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section on the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 7 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

Why do you think people do not like to talk about death? Do people need to fear death? [*Invite discussion*]

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians because he had heard reports from multiple sources about numerous problems within the church at Corinth. Factions and divisions, sexual immorality within the congregation, and arrogance and abuse of spiritual gifts all plagued the church membership. And besides all of these problems, some in the church claimed that there would be no resurrection of the dead at Christ's second coming. They were taking away the hope of the Christians. In today's passage, we read Paul's reply to these false teachings.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passages together.*]

Paul began his argument at the beginning of this chapter by recounting in verses 1-11 the basic gospel message that he received and then proclaimed to the Corinthian church members. This gospel message included the truth that Christ died for our sins. But after his crucifixion, death, and burial, Jesus rose from the dead.

Verses 12-19 are a summary of Paul's basic argument for the reality of resurrection. If there is no resurrection, then Jesus did not rise from the grave. If Jesus did not rise from the grave, then we are still in our sins. If we are still in our sins, then our hope in Christ is only for this life and not for the life to come. And if our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are among all people the most pitiful.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that their hope in Christ for their salvation was valid beyond this life. This is not to say that there is no benefit in this life to being a Christian. Surely, there is! But, as Christians, we have hope that there is more than just this life. There is an abundant life to come. There is the hope of the blessing of being with God for all eternity! Why is there this hope? Because of the resurrection.

Paul argues that just as Christ was resurrected, so we will be also. Just as Christ defeated death, so will we. This does not mean that we will not die, but that even if we die a physical death, we will be physically resurrected, just as Christ died and was resurrected. This is the hope of the Christian. This world is not all we have. There is more.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

This is, of course, contrary to what prosperity gospel preachers teach. They make Christianity all about this life, promising health and wealth and favor in the here and now. They forsake the

promise of salvation and the restoration of God's image in us in the age to come.

And Paul said that if we only have hope in Christ for this life, then we should be the most pitied (1 Cor 15:19). The prosperity teachers, who place their hope in the blessings of this age, are the ones to be pitied. All their hope in money, cars, houses, material blessings, incantations and proclamations of health will fail them. These things do not have the power to resurrect them.

They are to be pitied because they have staked their lives on something that is not true.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians about "the enemies of the cross of Christ," "of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears" that "their end is destruction. Their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Phil 3:18-19 ESV).

How do we truly flourish?

In Paul's next sentence to the Philippians, he contrasted the destructive end of those whose minds are set on earthly things with our future: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil 3:20-21). We have a better hope in Jesus.

When we hope in Jesus, God's favor on us may be seen now in material and physical blessings, but it may not. Even if we are blessed materially, following Jesus is a costly endeavor. Christians can expect to be persecuted for their faith (Matt 10:16-25). Christ expects Christians to take up their cross and follow him (Matt 10:38; 16:24). He expects us to leave behind things that we treasure to follow him (Matt 8:22; 19:21).

But we are in a process now. We are being made holy. But we are not yet fully holy. We are being made like Christ, but we are not yet completely like him. We need not fear or worry about this "not yet" because we are forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And the day of our resurrection and our full transformation into Christ's image is yet to come.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What are the false hopes you've had in the past? What are the false hopes you are still tempted to believe in?
2. How does the truth of the resurrection give you hope for today and for the age to come?
3. Who do you know who should be pitied because of their false hopes? How can you compassionately speak the truth of the gospel to them?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

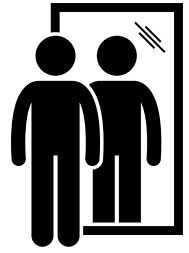
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We Will Bear the Image of Christ Fully When We Are Resurrected — Part 2

Main Idea: Though we still live under the curse, we will bear the image of Christ fully when he comes again and we are raised from the dead.

Scripture Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know we will fully bear the image of Christ, but not yet.



Heart - I want participants to anticipate Christ's second coming and our completion as we are raised from the dead.



Hands - I want participants to ask Christ to transform the most un-Christlike areas of their lives.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and point to this lesson's title on the arc. Because this lesson is a continuation of the previous lesson, the title should already be written on the arc.

DISCUSSION

Do you know any children who look just like their parents? Did they look like them from birth, or did they look more like them as they grew up? [*Invite discussion*]

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the future resurrection to refute those who denied its reality. His instruction on this topic was broad enough to apply to far more issues than the matter at hand during Paul's day. Indeed, Paul referred to the resurrection of the dead as believers' bearing the image of Christ in the future. What he taught about the image of Christ continues our discussion of our theme, the image of God, and how this biblical theme refutes the message of the prosperity gospel and Neo-Pentecostal preachers.

In today's passage, we will continue to read Paul's reply to the false teachings in the church at Corinth that claimed there would be no resurrection of the dead. In our previous lesson, at the beginning of this chapter, we read Paul's recounting of the gospel and that we can believe our sins were forgiven and we will be resurrected because Christ was first raised from the dead. According to Paul, it is impossible to deny the resurrection and to call oneself a Christian.

Verses 20-34 represent an outline of the order of the resurrection. Christ was the first to be raised from the dead. Then the resurrection of believers in Jesus Christ will come at his second coming.

Paul responded further to his critics' objections to the resurrection in verses 35-41. Those who had denied the reality of the resurrection were following popular thinking of the day among the Greeks and most philosophers. These New Testament-era intellectuals believed that the spiritual world was pure and unchanging whereas the material world was impure, imperfect, and constantly undergoing change. This mindset considered the idea of a future resurrection into a material body as foolish and completely undesirable. However, Paul demonstrated that while this physical temporal body is marred by sin, our future bodies will be pure and eternal. And our eternal bodies will be physical, not merely spiritual.

Our focus passage today, verses 42-49, has two sections, each comparing the first Adam of Genesis 1-3 with Jesus, the last Adam, as heads of the human race. Paul's intention was to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus as the last Adam over the first Adam, the father of the human race. Paul ends the passage with a future hope of believers that is also an admonition: let us bear the image of the heavenly, Jesus Christ, with increasing clarity that will culminate at the end of all things.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

In the first section of our passage (vv. 42-44), Paul continued his argument from the previous paragraph and proceeded to compare believers' status as human beings related first to Adam, the father of the human race, then with Jesus, whom Paul calls the "last Adam." The idea is that both Adam and Jesus act as heads of the human race. Both served as representatives. Paul's intention was to demonstrate the advantages and the blessings of those who are now "in Christ, the last Adam" as compared to when they were "in Adam." He made four comparisons to illustrate the superiority of Jesus. In each case, he referred to the body as a "seed" that is planted in this age "in Adam," but is raised "in Christ."

1. **Though the body is sown as perishable, it is raised imperishable:** Believers in Jesus Christ are born into this world as sinners whose mortal bodies will eventually die, either through mishap, poor health, or old age. But at the resurrection, believers' bodies will be raised with bodies that are imperishable. Those bodies will never grow old. They will never suffer harm. They will never grow sick. They will never die.
2. **Though the body is sown in dishonor, it is raised in honor:** Believers in Jesus Christ are born into this world as sinners whose bodies exhibit the dishonor that we inherited from the father of the human race, Adam. It is dishonorable that our bodies not only die but that they suffer corruption and decay after death. But at the resurrection, believers' bodies will be raised in glory since our bodies will share in the glory of Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the last Adam. Philippians 3:21 (NASB) says that Jesus Christ "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has to subject all things to Himself."
3. **Though the body is sown in weakness, it is raised in power:** Believers in Jesus Christ are born into this world as sinners whose bodies manifest our weakness in this present age. We battle daily against the world, the flesh, and the devil because we came from Adam, the father of the human race. Our bodies manifest this weakness when we succumb to temptation and sin in ways that inflict harm on our bodies, i.e., drunkenness, fornication, drugs, etc. But at the resurrection, the bodies of believers are raised in power—the power of Jesus Christ that is not subject to the sinful enticements of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In Christ, the last Adam, we will have power over those spiritual enemies.

4. **Though the body is sown as a natural body, it is raised as a spiritual body:** Believers in Jesus Christ are born into this world as sinners whose bodies are from this natural world, a world cursed by sin through the transgression of Adam, the head of the human race. But at the resurrection, believers will receive bodies that are from the age of the Spirit, brought about by Jesus Christ, the last Adam.

The second section of our passage is found in verses 45-49. Here, Paul preached a sermon from Genesis 2:7. Only, Paul did more than explain the Genesis passage. He also built further teaching from it. He did all of this by again comparing Adam, the father of the human race who "became a living soul" to Christ, the last Adam, who is a "life-giving Spirit."

1. **What was natural came first, then the spiritual:** Believers in Jesus Christ begin life from the natural world as descendants of Adam, "who became a living soul." At the resurrection, they will be from the new creation in the Spirit, whom Christ gave.
2. **From earth then from heaven:** Believers in Jesus Christ begin life from earth, this fallen world. At the resurrection, they will be raised with bodies that are part of the new heavens and the new earth, which came from God through Christ, the life-giving Spirit.
3. **Those from earth are earthy, those of heaven are heavenly:** Similarly, believers in Jesus Christ begin life on this earth as earthy, from this present fallen age in Adam, the father of the human race who likewise returned to the dust. At the resurrection, their glorified resurrection bodies will be heavenly, from God in Christ the life-giving Spirit and not subject to the fallen condition of this age.

The passage ends with this admonition: "As we have borne the image of the earthy, let us now bear the image of the heavenly." Some Bible translations may read, "we will bear the image of the heavenly." The earliest manuscript evidence suggests that the correct reading of verse 49 is "let us also bear the image of the heavenly." So then, as believers of Jesus Christ, we look forward to the second coming and the resurrection of the saints in Jesus Christ. On that day, we will receive glorious resurrection bodies that do not die, that exhibit God's power in us through the Spirit. We begin to manifest that power today, not in signs and wonders, but in the transformed nature that Christ gives to us. As Paul wrote, "though the outward man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16 NASB).

The image of God is not just something mentioned in Genesis 1. It is seen throughout the whole of Scripture in the grand story of redemption. In the arc of redemption, the "image" of Christ in this

passage is simultaneously part of the redemption epoch of the grand narrative as well as in the completion of all things.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Prosperity teaching, on the other hand, emphasizes how we can manifest the fullness of the glory of Christ today. Some, like Kenneth Hagin, in *Don't Blame God*, write "Healing belongs to you. It belongs to you because sickness is of the enemy. It belongs to you because you are a spiritual child of Abraham. It belongs to you because sickness is a curse, and Christ has redeemed you from the curse of the law." His words are deceptive because he uses Scripture and half-truths. He does not mention that it was God who placed the curse upon the man, the woman, and all creation as a sign of judgment for their sin (Gen 3:16-19). Hagin also indicates in his *Bible Prayer Study Course* that Christians who do not receive healing lack faith: You "need and want what His Word has promised and believe you receive them when you ask for them. Then you will have whatever it is you need from God. Some people continually ask me why God won't heal them after they have had many people pray for them and have had no results." Hagin does not mention that God was the one who sent "a messenger of Satan" to torment Paul (2 Cor 12:7).

How do we truly flourish?

Our passage today reveals the already-not-yet tension that resolves at the consummation of all things. We live in the tension in "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4), from the fall until the second coming, meaning that our human bodies are mortal, they grow sick, and they suffer weakness. At the same time, we look forward to the "age to come" (Mark 10:30) that Jesus Christ inaugurated at his resurrection but will not be seen in its fullness until he comes and ushers in the resurrection from the dead. During this time, between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the day of his second coming, believers live in the tension between these two ages in the history of redemption.

God does heal on occasion. But not always (see 2 Cor 12:7-10; Phil 2:25-27; 2 Tim 4:20). God will raise the dead, but not until Jesus comes back. And if Jesus does not return very soon, we will grow old and eventually die. But we anticipate the resurrection, when Jesus will make all things new, including our frail, mortal, human bodies. We, therefore, look with hope for the day when Jesus returns.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. Imagine that a Christian is sick at the hospital. What would Kenneth Hagin say about this illness based on the quote from him above? Can we accept what Hagin teaches?
2. What would a believer in Jesus say to a Christian friend or family member in the hospital, based on the passage we read today?
3. What is one area of your life that is un-Christlike that you especially want to bury like a seed and see Christ resurrect it and transform it into his image? Ask him to begin imparting his life-giving Spirit into that area of your life today.

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

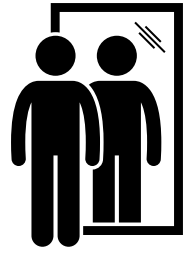
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Note: In verse 29, Paul made a reference to the “baptism for the dead.” This obscure passage eludes commentators and is, in fact, the only reference to baptism for the dead in the entire New Testament. Our focus is on the resurrection of the dead, not baptism for the dead. We should not make any rash decisions or hasty judgments about a single reference in Scripture that eludes theologians and commentators.

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9

We Must Live in Light of Who We Will Be

Main Idea: We can handle our present realities because of who we are and who we will be in the future.

Scripture Passage: 1 Corinthians 6:1-6

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know they have an important role in the future that is bigger than they can comprehend.



Heart - I want participants to feel responsible for themselves and the people in their church.



Hands - I want participants to lovingly steward their communities.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 9 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

How do the things we do today prepare us for situations we will face in the future? Can you give an example from your life? [*Invite discussion*]

In the creation story, God created humans in his image (Gen 1:27). Being made in God's image means that humans were created to rule over creation. They were given the command to subdue and care for creation and to increase and be fruitful. However, the first humans sinned and caused all of creation to be marred by sin. Their sin led to humanity's falling short of God's glory as they failed to be what they were created to be. The image of God was marred. But in his love and grace, God has given his Son, Jesus Christ, through whom restoration is accomplished when we believe in him. With this faith comes the assurance that at the completion of God's plan, the image of God will be fully restored in humanity. We will again be his vice-regents who carry out his purpose and will for creation.

This truth is highlighted in 1 Corinthians 6. In this passage, Paul addresses a matter affecting the everyday life of believers. One member of the Corinthian church had a grievance against another. But instead of handling the conflict within the church, they took the matter before the local civil authorities. Paul was surprised that they didn't handle the trivial disagreement within the church.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Notice that Paul did not say Christians should never appear in court. In fact, in his letter to the Romans, he clearly wrote that Christians must submit to government authorities. But here, Paul was shocked that Christians were unable to handle such a small matter within the church. He was also shocked because he knew the plan for Christians at the end of this age—to help judge the world and angels.

It is easy to get distracted by the idea of Christians judging angels. This sounds fascinating. It does not mean, however, that we will sit in judgment by our own power, but we will have a part in judging evil angels. Paul said nothing more about this. We wish he did, but he didn't. Paul mentioned it as though it was understood, and then he moved on. Still, his point was clear: the day is coming when, as the highlight of God's creation, as the ones made in the image of God, Christians will be involved in judging the world.

Paul wondered how the Christians in Corinth would judge angels (a weighty matter) if they could not handle trivial matters among themselves now. Here it is important to understand that the church is a living community whose existence as God's people in this age must align with who they will be in the next age.

And there is a part of Paul's discussion about the next age that we cannot miss—we will judge. Why will Christians judge angels? Because we are the ones made in God's image. We are higher than the angels. (See Hebrews 1.) Jesus did not die to save the rebellious angels, but he did die to save rebellious people. He died to redeem the ones made in his image.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Neo-Pentecostals like to say that we can command angels today. They claim that we possess the power to control fallen angelic spirits in a manner that does not follow Scripture. Their view fails to consider the epistle of Jude in the New Testament.

Jude warned against false teachers among the followers of Jesus who "by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties" (Jude 8 NASB). He said their reviling of angels contradicts the Archangel Michael's behavior when he disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. Michael wanted to bury Moses in a secret place to prevent any idolatry of Moses. But the devil wanted to erect a shrine to Moses that would encourage idolatrous worship. In this instance, the Archangel Michael did not respond to the devil in the same way as these false teachers. Rather than give a railing accusation against the devil, Michael responded, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 9).

These false teachers that Jude warned the church about resemble many Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel teachers today. We should not follow their practices concerning angels. It is enough to know that, when we are fully conformed to the image of Christ, we will judge angels in the age to come. Created in the image of God, human beings will have dominion over every part of creation and even the angels. But that day has not come yet.

How do we truly flourish?

Being in God's image entails being his vice-regents and stewards. We manage and oversee that which is God's. But since the fall, the image has been distorted. But because of Christ, it will be restored. A day is coming when we will reign with Christ, when we will be the vice-regents we were designed to be. But for now, just as the Corinthians struggled, we also still struggle with the trivial, but we look forward to the weightier responsibilities.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. Why was Paul so surprised that the Christians in Corinth had not handled their trivial case within the church?
2. Do we have power over angels today? Why or why not?
3. Why will we reign as God's vice-regents?
4. If we are God's vice-regents, how can we live differently today?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

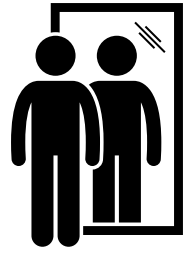
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Note: The Corinthian Jews had already taken Paul to court in Acts 18:12-17, and the magistrate refused to hear their case because he thought it was trivial.

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10

We Can Hope Even as We Suffer

Main Idea: We will suffer in this world, but we can find peace in knowing we will not suffer on the new earth.

Scripture Passage: Revelation 21:1-4; 22:3

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know we will suffer in this world, but not in the next.



Heart - I want participants to know peace even when they suffer.



Hands - I want participants to worship God even as they suffer.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 10 on the arc with the mirror icon..

DISCUSSION

Has there ever been a time when the promise of something that was coming helped you endure hardship in the moment? How did that promise help you? [*Invite discussion*]

Revelation is a book of prophecy that involves both warning and consolation, it foretells future judgments and future blessings. Revelation talks about the coming suffering and persecution for those who trust in God. However, it also gives them hope that their master will avenge them. The judgment of the world and of Satan are made clear. All who do not believe in God will be forever condemned, while those who have been saved by God will be blessed to dwell with God forever. It is a book that shows God's power and victory over the powers of darkness. His people will reap the benefits of his victory. One benefit will be that the image of God will be fully restored within them, and they will dwell and rule with God forever.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passages together.*]

Today's passages describe a time immediately after the final judgments of the world, Satan, the false prophet, and the beast. John declared that at that point the old life and its hardships will be gone. Sin and death will be defeated. The old will pass away. Behold, the new will come! This was an encouragement to the suffering church.

The first verse of Revelation 21 introduces this hope to the saints—a new heaven and a new earth. This is a declaration that the sin-corrupted heaven and the sin-corrupted earth will be destroyed. The new heavens and the new earth were foreseen by Isaiah (65:18). In Revelation, we find the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. In the original language, "new" does not necessarily mean separate or other. It refers more to quality and freshness. The new heavens and the new earth will be of better quality than the old creation. Primarily what will make the heavens and the earth "new" is that the physical dwelling of God will be, once more, with his people. In the current age, heaven is God's dwelling, where he is physically separated from his people. No person can see him face to face and still live. People can see God only through the eyes of faith, but in the age to come, God will dwell with his people.

Furthermore, the sea will be no more. This signifies the total victory of God over the powers of darkness. The book of Revelation portrays the sea as the home to the beast that came to torment the children of God (Rev 13:1-10). Therefore, God will eliminate everything that has been profaned by evil. God will do away with the chaos of a sin-corrupted world, a chaos that has led the creation to exert dominion over man, rather than man exerting dominion over creation. That will change. The chaos will cease.

As we progress in the passage, we find that John saw the new Jerusalem, the Holy City. The old city was profaned when the people persecuted the prophets and even crucified the Lord. The profaning of the city continued in Revelation when the two witnesses were killed (11:2-11:8). But in the new heavens and the new earth, God will create a new Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem will be a delight to God, and its people will be his joy. John called the new Jerusalem the bride of the Lamb, who is Jesus Christ, who came as the sacrifice for our sins (John 1:29, 35-36). Calling the city the bride of the Lamb reveals something of God's personal relationship to his people and alludes to the description of the church in its glorified state. The new Jerusalem will be in some way as the holy of holies was in the temple. The saints, as the priests of God, will have the great privilege of serving him, and there will be no more hindrance to their service and worship.

The new Jerusalem can also be viewed as the restored Eden. In the new heavens and the new earth, the curse from Genesis 3 will be removed, and all that resembles the image of God will be reinstated. God's people will no longer experience any kind of pain, grief, or death. Instead, they will have eternal life, abundant provisions, complete healing, and absolute security. All of this will be made possible by the sovereign presence of God and of the Lamb. What God created for his people will be fulfilled.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

But Neo-Pentecostal pastors teach that since Jesus has died and been resurrected, he has already restored everything to perfection now. They claim that anyone who believes in Jesus can simply pray and experience a life without pain.

How do we truly flourish?

Jesus taught that in this world we will have tribulation. However, he gives us his peace, the kind that we cannot receive from this world. We still live on this old, imperfect earth, where Satan and all the powers of evil are still present. Creation still overtakes humans at times. But like the suffering churches to whom John wrote the book of Revelation, we find hope in knowing this world will be renewed and Eden will be restored. Then we will be all God made us to be.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What are the aspects of the new heavens and the new earth in this passage that will bring peaceful living and flourishing?
2. Which part of the new heavens and the new earth do you wish were already true today?
3. Can you tell us about a time when Jesus gave you peace in the midst of your suffering?
4. How do you envision you will worship God in the new Jerusalem?

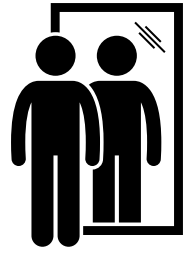
*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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We Are Citizens of Heaven Eagerly Awaiting Our Savior's Return

Main Idea: As citizens of heaven, we have great reasons to eagerly await the return of our Savior.

Scripture Passage: Philippians 3:17-21

Scripture Focus: Philippians 3:21

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know they are citizens of heaven—or they can be.



Heart - I want participants to eagerly await the return of their Savior.



Hands - I want participants to live as if this world is not their home.

Review the thesis statement and the first main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 1: We flourish when we increasingly reflect God's image in all of creation.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 11 on the arc with the mirror icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever been homesick? What causes us to miss home?

[*Invite discussion*]

Do you think of heaven as your home? Do you think of heaven as another country? [*Invite discussion*]

Paul wrote the third chapter in his letter to the church in Philippi to deal with some false teachers who were just beginning to arise in the church (Phil 3:2). Paul countered their teaching by warning the Philippians not to put their confidence in their flesh or in adhering to the law, not to trust in their self-righteousness. Instead, Paul said he put his faith in Christ and his righteousness. Paul counted all his good works and all he had gained in this life as garbage. Instead of valuing his earthly life and his good works, he pressed on “toward the goal to win the prize for which God [had called him] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14 NIV). He then encouraged the Christians in Philippi to likewise live as citizens of heaven, people who had been saved from destruction and whose bodies would someday be transformed to conform to Christ’s resurrection body.

Let’s take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Three things are very important to be noted here:

1. The believer’s body right now is corrupted by sin. It is lowly and humiliating because it is subjected to sin and selfishness, evil and destruction. The body is weak and corruptible, dying, aging, and mortal.
2. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, believers’ bodies will be transformed to become just like the glorious body of Christ.
3. The transformation of believers’ bodies will be made possible through the power of Christ that is able to subdue all things. This is the very power that created the world and all that is in the world.

This transformation of believers’ bodies to conform with Jesus Christ’s own glorified resurrection body represents the moment the image of God will be completed in the history of redemption. To review, first, God created the first man and woman in his image and likeness, giving them bodies that had the potential for immortality and continued fellowship with God. We call this *creation*. The status changed, however, when our first parents rebelled in the garden of Eden, thus making them susceptible to death, decay, and illness because of the moral contamination of sin. We call this moment the *fall*. Sadly, the fall seriously marred the image of God, but it did not destroy God’s image in us. The good news

is that through Jesus's death, burial, and victorious resurrection, he transforms all who believe in him by faith to conform with his will and nature. We are now in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ. We call this *redemption*. And at the end of this age, the transformation will be complete when Christ returns to earth and we are resurrected. Our risen bodies will be transformed to conform to Jesus's own glorious resurrection body. We call this *completion*.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

The prosperity gospel is a perilous gospel that substitutes a vision of present earthly happiness for the biblical vision of the final restoration of heaven and earth. It is a trap that ensnares the poor and the weak and leads them away from the love of Christ. Unfortunately, this is the false gospel that some preachers uphold in the contemporary times, leading many people away from the truth of the word of God. Also, many people, because of their untamed desires to accumulate wealth, live as if the present world is their permanent abode.

How do we truly flourish?

Many people have lost sight of the glorious expectation of Christ's return and his transformation of believers. But we are to live as citizens of heaven and not of this world. We should eagerly await the return of our Savior because it will be more amazing than we can comprehend.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. How do you know if you are a citizen of heaven?
2. What are some ways you've focused on living only this earthly life instead of living as a citizen of heaven?
3. What will happen to us when Christ returns?
4. How can we, as citizens of heaven, live as if we are eagerly waiting for our Savior's return?
5. Who do you know who is trapped in the false promises of the prosperity gospel or other false promises?
6. How can we lovingly respond to those who are trapped?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the first main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

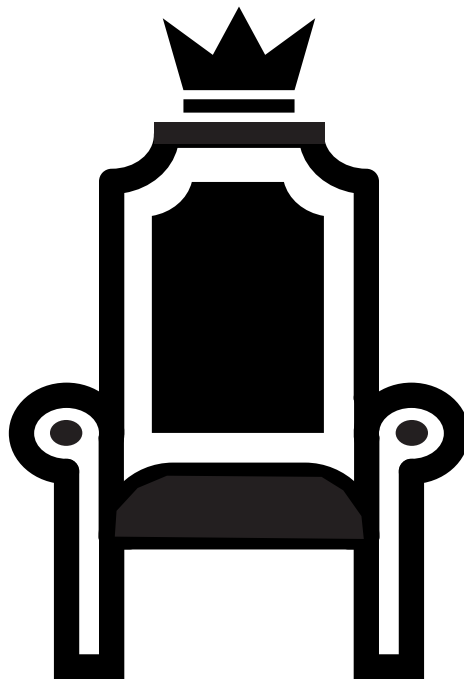
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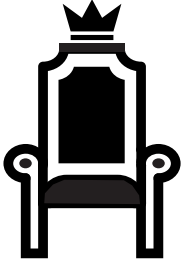
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The Kingdom of God



**We flourish as recipients and participants
in the restoration of God's kingdom.**



KINGDOM OF GOD
CREATION

12

God Created Us to Be Vice-Regents in His Kingdom

Main Idea: God created humans to be the caretakers of his creation.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 1:20-31

Scripture Focus: Genesis 1:26-30

OBJECTIVES

Head - I want participants to know God created them to care for his creation.



Heart - I want participants to feel responsible for God's creation.



Hands - I want participants to steward God's creation well.



Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

As you begin this lesson, you can give each person a blank copy of the redemptive arc with the throne icon at the top (Appendix 3), hang an enlarged blank copy of the redemptive arc where you can write on it and everyone can see it, or draw an arc that you can write on as you teach the lesson. Label the four acts of the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Creation section next to the number 12.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever been asked to watch over something that was valuable to someone else? Tell us the story and the responsibilities you had. [*Invite discussion.*]

When God created the world, he demonstrated his absolute rule over every part of creation. One of the ways he did so was by creating the first human couple, Adam and Eve, and granting them authority over all creation. Adam and Eve, then, acted as God's *vice-regents*, people who exercise authority on behalf of another. In this case, Adam and Eve tended the creation under God's authority. In our text for this lesson, we will see that God appointed human beings as stewards over his creation. Both our creation as the "image of God" and our mandated oversight of the creation reveal this status for humanity.

The *image of God* is a broad concept in Scripture. We learned in an earlier lesson that in the cultures where the events in the Bible took place, kings described themselves as the "image" and "likeness" of their pagan gods when they ruled their kingdoms. In their cultures, only their kings were believed to rule in the "image and likeness" of their pagan deities. But the Bible uses the expressions "image" and "likeness" differently than the pagan nations did. God created the whole of humanity in his image and likeness, rather than only a privileged few such as the kings.

However, as in the other ancient cultures, the expressions "image and likeness" seem to convey similar ideas of rulership and authority upon those who bear these titles. In the case of the Bible, that status does not belong exclusively to kings but to the entire human race. This idea of rulership and authority, acting as God's vice-regents over creation, is clear in verses 26 to 30.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

After God commanded Adam and Eve to be "fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth," he mandated their stewardship over all creation. First, God commanded Adam and Eve to "subdue the earth." The implication here was that they should subdue the land, the seas, and the air. Next, God commanded Adam and Eve to rule over three groups of animals: the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. The imagery is comprehensive. At this time, humankind exercised rulership of all animals everywhere within creation.

We conclude, therefore, that God created the world with the intention that humankind should exercise dominion and authority over his creation—his kingdom. To the extent that we tend to the creation—God's kingdom—according to his purpose and design, we

fulfill our mandate and function. Our stewardship does not give us the freedom to do whatever we want to the creation. Rather, it gives us the freedom to fulfill the role God has given us.

But as we read through the rest of the Bible, we see that God's kingdom follows a historical arc that moves beyond creation. God's kingdom moves through four historical periods that we call *creation, fall, redemption, and completion*. [*Point to these on the redemptive arc, Appendix 3.*] Interestingly, in the New Testament, the kingdom of God is described very much as it is described in Genesis 1, and yet it becomes even more glorious. Stay with us through the end of this Bible study to find out what the kingdom of God will be like in the age to come.

For now, we need to know and understand that at creation, God's plan was for the man and the woman to rule over creation. And while the fall would lead to sickness, death, poverty, and disease, none of those existed at creation. God made the world perfect. It was good. Indeed, it was very good.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Like the ancient rulers, the prosperity gospel and Neo-Pentecostal preachers emphasize that only a select few people have special authority. They are called Spirit-power persons who represent a "man/woman of God." They claim that their authority comes from the Holy Spirit who enables them to heal, cast out demons, and perform miracles. They say this authority resides in themselves and is proven by their signs and wonders.

How do we truly flourish?

The Bible, however, says that at creation all human beings exercise authority over the creation. This authority does not grant the power to cast out demons, to heal the sick, or to work miracles. But it explains why we have developed technology, why we tame animals, and why we are the dominant species on the planet. Our stewardship of creation was God's intention all along. God made us vice-regents in his kingdom.

On the list (Appendix 5: What Can We Say?), ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

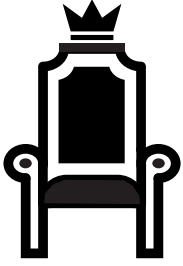
1. According to Genesis 1:26-28, how can we demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God today?
2. If human beings are God's vice-regents over creation, does that mean that they can do whatever they want to God's creation? Why or why not?
3. What is one specific way that humans demonstrate our dominion over creation today?
4. How would you respond to a Neo-Pentecostal or prosperity gospel preacher who speaks of our "Spirit authority?"

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

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KINGDOM OF GOD
FALL

13

We Await the Restoration of the World

Main Idea: Because our relationship with God was broken, everything was broken, but everything will be restored in God's kingdom.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 3:2-19

Scripture Focus: Genesis 3:12-19

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that suffering will not end until the whole creation is restored.



Heart - I want participants to feel a longing for the restoration and redemption of the whole world, not just for themselves.



Hands - I want participants to lead people to a restored relationship with God and his kingdom.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Fall section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 13 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

What role do believers have to help alleviate the suffering of others and of creation? [*Invite discussion.*]

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see that God intended for Adam and Eve to “cultivate and keep” the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve acted as God’s caretakers over the creation, which was God’s kingdom. This arrangement was God’s perfect plan. Unfortunately, God’s perfect plan did not last because Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

Let’s take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

After Adam and Eve sinned, God pronounced curses not only on Adam and Eve, but also on creation.

To Eve, God pronounced curses that continue today to women everywhere. Women now experience pain in childbirth. There is also discord between the man and the woman in their marital relationship. God said that Eve’s desire would be for her husband. The word used for “desire” is not talking about sexual desire. Rather, it is talking about the intention of emotional manipulation. The same word that is translated as “desire” in this passage is also used in Genesis 4:7 when God tells Cain, “If you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; and its *desire* is for you, but you must master it” (NASB, emphasis added). The message is that sin desires to manipulate and dominate Cain. And the same word is used with reference to Eve and her desire for her husband. The woman wanted to dominate her husband, but the husband would dominate the woman.

To Adam, God pronounced additional curses on creation. First, the ground was cursed. The result of this curse was that his physical labor was now difficult. The one who was the caretaker of creation would now find that task laborious. It is important to note here that work itself was not bad. Before Adam and Eve sinned, work was joyous and fulfilling. But sin corrupted everything, even work.

Humans themselves were also cursed. They would now die physically, and their bodies would return to the (cursed) ground where they would decompose.

The snake was cursed. He went onto his belly. He ate the dust. But even more importantly, there would be a feud between him and the seed of the woman. This curse was more than humans’ dislike for all snakes. This was a messianic promise.

Genesis 3:15 is known as the *protoevangelium*—the first gospel. Immediately following sin and the curse, God gave hope of redemption. The snake (Satan) would cause problems with men, but the seed of the woman (Jesus) would eventually crush his head.

This verse tells us of the victory obtained by Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. But, in being mentioned, it reminds us that more was being cursed, that more had changed than just physical elements. Sin had also affected the spiritual aspect.

The kingdom of God, with reference to humankind, has a vertical and a horizontal relationship: God in relationship with humans (vertical), and humans in relationship to the creation (horizontal).

This passage also tells us how our relationship with God impacts our relationship with the creation.

- A. When humans have a right relationship with God, the relationship with creation is good.
- B. When the relationship with God is broken, the relationship with creation is broken as well.

What do Neo-Pentecostals teach?

In contrast, the Neo-Pentecostals and the prosperity gospel preachers proclaim that we can live lives free from sickness and pain, and we can avoid poverty in the here-and-now. Neo-Pentecostals and prosperity gospel preachers proclaim a false message about a false hope.

How do we truly flourish?

Yes, the Bible tells us that Jesus is making all things new. We look forward to a future day when Jesus returns to establish his kingdom, when we will experience the blessings of new heavens and a new earth. This new creation, Christ's kingdom, will be free from sin and death, pain and suffering, sorrow and grief. But that day has not yet come.

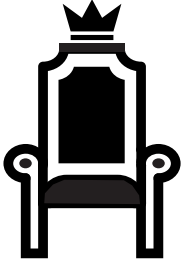
Salvation is more than just physical blessings. It is even more than just spiritual blessings. How we receive these blessings will differ from the prosperity gospel perspective. We understand this passage indicates that what we require is more than just the salvation of our souls. What is needed is a cosmic redemption that liberates the whole creation from the curse of sin.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. Is a life free from poverty, sickness, and suffering guaranteed to followers of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
2. What would you tell a prosperity teacher or someone who follows them when they say we can have blessings that liberate us from financial need, sickness, and sorrow?
3. How should followers of Jesus respond to poverty, illness, and sorrow in this life? How should our response be different from those who do not put their faith in Jesus?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*



KINGDOM OF GOD
REDEMPTION

14

We Must Be Born Again

Main Idea: The only way to enter the kingdom of God is to be born again.

Scripture Passage: John 3:1-21

Scripture Focus: John 3:5

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know how they can be born again and enter the kingdom of God.



Heart - I want participants to feel grateful that Christ has renewed their hearts and given them a new nature that wants to worship him.



Hands - I want participants to tell their friends and families how they can be born again and enter the kingdom of God.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 14 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

What's something you remember about the birth of your child or relative? Why do you think people feel so much joy over a new birth? [*Invite discussion.*]

In today's lesson, we will learn what it means to be "born again." We will also learn how being born again fits into the biblical theme of the kingdom of God. Finally, we will see how the biblical teaching about being "born again," corrects some of the false teaching from the prosperity gospel and Neo-Pentecostalism.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Nicodemus represents the Jewish religious group known as the Pharisees, noted for their strict observance of the law. The fact that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night is part of John's imagery. John contrasts darkness and light throughout his Gospel, and we witness the change from dark to light in the life of Nicodemus. When Nicodemus first meets with Jesus, he comes in spiritual darkness. Later, at the burial of Jesus, Nicodemus reveals his faith in Jesus in the light of day (John 19:38-42).

In this third chapter, Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus is a legitimate religious teacher because of the miracles he has performed. Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus is someone God has sent. Yet Nicodemus has come to visit with Jesus because, though he knows that Jesus is sent from God, he has yet to know who Jesus really is.

But Jesus does not stay on the topic of miracles. Rather, Jesus moves away from the miracles and discusses something more important: how one is to be saved and become a part of the kingdom of God. The phrase, "born again," means to receive a new nature. This nature is no longer in bondage to sin.

Nicodemus, however, does not understand Jesus's earthly description of the heavenly reality of how God saves us and gives us a new nature through Jesus Christ. Nicodemus asks what being born again means. Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Spirit is the one who regenerates people, who changes their hearts so that they turn in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ to save them from their sin and rebellion against God.

When people repent and believe on Jesus, or become "born again," Jesus restores their hearts for his kingdom. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away." That means Jesus restores what was lost in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned. The greatest loss that damaged their stewardship of God's creation was the loss of a heart that wanted to follow God's will and obey him. Their nature

was changed from righteousness to sinfulness. The greatest poverty of all humanity is spiritual poverty: *we are born dead in sin*.

The kingdom of God dwells in the hearts of those who believe and follow Jesus Christ. In Christ's kingdom, the biggest restoration that takes place is a change from being sinners condemned to the wrath of a holy God to becoming believers whose hearts long to worship God and follow his will. A gathering of believers as the church is a living community of God's kingdom. As the church grows and believers plant more churches, the kingdom of Jesus Christ grows until it covers the whole earth.

But the question that we must ask ourselves is whether we have been "born again." How do we know if we are born again? The Bible explains this very simply:

1. Recognize that God loves us and that he is holy and good (John 3:16).
2. Admit that we, along with all people, are born sinners who have rebelled against the will of a perfect and holy God. As such, we deserve death and hell (Rom 3:23; 6:23).
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty that we deserved for sin. He was buried, but he rose again on the third day to save us from the just punishment that we deserve for our sin (1 Cor. 15:3-5).
4. We must turn away from our sin and place our trust and confidence in Jesus Christ alone to save us from our sins. That confession is the first step in becoming part of the new kingdom where Jesus brings and restores what we lost in the fall.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

What the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God is the opposite of what the Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity gospel teachers want you to believe. They will tell you that the fundamental problem that people experience is poverty—lack of money or problems with health.

Yes, our main problem is poverty, but it is a spiritual poverty brought about by the spiritual condition that we inherited from our first parents. Unless our hearts are transformed by the gospel, all the great health and all the riches in the world will never be able to restore what human beings lost in the garden of Eden.

How do we truly flourish?

At the end of the age, after Jesus Christ returns in his glory, all will be perfect in the world. There will no longer be sickness and death. People will see abundance. But that time is still in the future.

For now, we must focus on our deepest and fundamental need, a need that goes deeper than mere money and our physical health. Our greatest need is spiritual renewal. This spiritual renewal, what the church calls salvation, is only possible through faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Putting our faith in Jesus is what it means to be “born again.” Have you made this decision?

Nicodemus visited Jesus at night to understand who Jesus really was. What he did not consider was that Jesus would reveal to him his greatest need: Nicodemus was not “born again.” He had not experienced spiritual renewal that can only come through faith in Jesus Christ.

This spiritual renewal is God’s initial work in us to renew his kingdom on earth. Since the fall of humanity, all human beings have rebelled against God. But spiritual renewal, salvation through Jesus Christ, is the first step in renewing the kingdom of Christ. This renewal takes place in the hearts and lives of all who have put their trust in Jesus Christ to save them from their sin and to give them a new nature.

This spiritual renewal, being “born again,” delivers us from our deepest poverty—spiritual poverty. The Neo-Pentecostals and prosperity gospel preachers miss the gospel and so miss the greatest need that all of us face. Our biggest problem is not our physical health nor a lack of money. Instead, our greatest need is spiritual renewal. This spiritual renewal is only possible through Jesus. Have you been “born again?” If not, now is the time to consider making this important decision.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

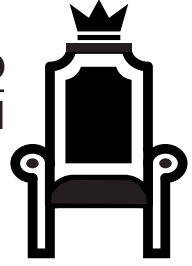
1. What does it mean to be “born again”?
2. How does being “born again” differ from what people teach about material blessings and personal prosperity?
3. How does being “born again” differ from “signs and wonders”?
4. Explain step by step how someone can become born again.
5. Do you know people who need to know how to be “born again?” How can you share this message or the story of Nicodemus with them?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

Gentry, Peter J. and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.

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Kingdom Citizens Repent

Main Idea: Jesus Christ has the authority to forgive sins and welcome people into the kingdom of God when they repent.

Scripture Passage: Matt 4:17; 5-7; 28:18

Scripture Focus: Matt 4:17; 28:18

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that God's kingdom is right behind them. They just need to turn around.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled that Jesus forgives them and welcomes them into God's kingdom. I want participants to confess their sins and repent.



Hands - I want participants to invite others into God's kingdom.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 15 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when a relationship was broken and you simply wanted the person to acknowledge they were wrong?

[Invite discussion]

Repentance means to change, to turn, to change one's mind, or to change one's life. Jesus presents repentance in today's passages as two turns—a negative turn away from sin and a positive turn toward God.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passages together.]*

God's fundamental requirement to inherit the kingdom of God is to turn to him by accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior and to forsake all sinful ways and acts. No sinner will inherit the kingdom of God. Jesus's teaching in this passage is meant to encourage people to turn away from sinful acts like insulting, stealing, cheating, adultery, cursing, self-centeredness, selfishness, bitterness, pride, anger, evil thoughts, lust, greed, and judgment—because the kingdom of God is right behind them. If only they will turn around.

There is a strong relationship between Matthew 4:17 and Matthew 28:18. Just as Matthew 4:17 presents Jesus's teaching on repentance, Matthew 28:18 affirms and assures Jesus's power to forgive all sins. Jesus's power is above all that is in heaven and on earth. His authority is over all the universe. His authority includes at least three areas:

- the power to reign,
- the power to govern and direct, and
- the power to forgive sins, to save and deliver. All those who confess their sins and repent from their evil ways will be saved through the saving grace and power of Jesus Christ.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, knowing that he had all authority, he commissioned the disciples and all who followed him to tell others about him. Notice that the commission is to talk about Jesus's teachings, and it's done in the name (the authority and power) of Jesus—not in the name of the believer. We strive to make much of him because he has conquered sin and death and given us redemption.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Many false teachers and preachers do not emphasize the concept of sin, the consequences of sin, and the need for repentance. Or they may proclaim salvation by works instead of salvation through

faith. Furthermore, they often proclaim the power and authority they have, not the power and authority of Jesus.

How do we truly flourish?

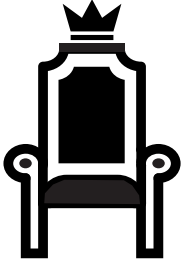
Repentance is fundamental to salvation. Nothing else can substitute for repentance. And thanks be to God that Jesus, our Savior, has the authority to forgive our sins and welcome us into God's kingdom.

***On the list**, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. How can someone enter God's kingdom?
2. What would you say to someone who offers to give you salvation if you give them something?
3. What sin is Jesus changing your mind about these days? Are you turning away from any sins right now?
4. Whom can you invite into God's kingdom? How can you invite them?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*



KINGDOM OF GOD
REDEMPTION

16

Kingdom Citizens Have Been Rescued

Main Idea: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and he has brought us into the kingdom of his Son.

Scripture Passage: Colossians 1:3-14

Scripture Focus: Colossians 1:13-14

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know how to be delivered from the domain of darkness.



Heart - I want participants to feel grateful for their rescue and redemption.



Hands - I want participants to tell others how to be delivered.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 16 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever been in a situation from which you needed to be rescued? How did you feel about the person who rescued you?

[Invite discussion]

When Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colossae, some new teachings had found their way into the church. Paul referred to the teachings as the traditions of man (Col 2:8). He wrote to warn and encourage the church to hold fast to Christ and to his finished work that had rescued them.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passage together.]*

The letter begins with praise. Paul praises God for the deliverance he has given to those who believed the gospel and put their faith in Jesus Christ. In verse 13, we see that he rescued us from the domain of darkness. The word "rescued" means to be delivered, to be set free. It has the same idea as what happened in the exodus from Egypt, when God took his people out of slavery and led them into the promised land. The exodus is the great salvation event of the Old Testament, and the cross and resurrection are the great salvation event of the New Testament.

We see some similarities between these two events in the church of Colossae. Just as the people of Israel forgot about their deliverance from slavery in Egypt on their way to the promised land, the church in Colossae experienced deliverance and then wavered in their faith. And similarly, it seems these new believers in Colossae were misled by new teachings.

Paul confronts them with the truth that God has delivered them from the domain of darkness; therefore, they cannot live like the people who are still in the realm of Satan. When the Bible talks about darkness, it refers to evil or sin. Because of humanity's fall from God's glory in the Garden of Eden, we are born into the kingdom of darkness—dead in our sins and enemies of God (Eph 2). However, by the grace given to us to trust and believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we become citizens of the kingdom of God—delivered into the marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).

This is about belonging. We who are in Christ once belonged to the rule and guidance of Satan. We were citizens of that realm, citizens of the kingdom of darkness. We were captured in our sin, dead in our trespasses. We were incapable of pleasing God, desiring only to please our own lusts and appetites. But we have been delivered from that!

God has brought us into the kingdom of his Son—the kingdom of God. Citizenship in God’s kingdom is granted by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, who gave himself for us. When people enter the kingdom of the Son of God, they receive redemption through Jesus’s death. To be redeemed means someone paid a price for us. It implies that our souls were in bondage from which we needed to be ransomed. God has secured our ransom, our redemption, our rescue in Christ.

Mark 10:45 (ESV) states that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Therefore, we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, through which we receive forgiveness of our sins. It is through redemption that we enter the kingdom of God, that we are restored to the place God originally intended for us to be.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Prosperity theology, however, attempts to steal God’s glory and give it to men. Neo-Pentecostal pastors preach that, because they are in Christ, they have the ability and power to deliver people from the domain of darkness. It is disheartening to hear someone say this. They are claiming to be able to do what only God can do.

They may also preach that being delivered from darkness means being delivered instead from present-day sickness, poverty, and suffering.

How do we truly flourish?

It is clear from these verses in Colossians, though, that Paul is speaking about deliverance from sin and death. We need spiritual salvation more than we need physical salvation. We need deliverance from our sin.

The time is coming when this deliverance will be fully realized—the King and his people dwelling together in one place (Rev 21:1-7), just as God intended in Genesis. There will be fellowship and enjoyment. There will be marvelous light. There will be freedom. While we wait for the fullness of that day, you can experience that freedom, that redemption and deliverance even today. Have you trusted in Christ for your salvation? Have you been delivered from darkness to light? Have you entered the kingdom of God? If not, today is the day of salvation.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What do you understand the domain of darkness to be?
2. How are people delivered from the domain of darkness?
3. What is your response to Jesus, who gave his life to rescue you?
4. How will you help other people understand true deliverance?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

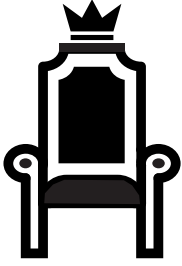
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KINGDOM OF GOD
REDEMPTION

17

We Are a Kingdom of Priests

Main Idea: As followers of Christ, our role is to represent God's kingdom to all people.

Scripture Passage: Exodus 19:1-9; 1 Peter 2:9

Scripture Focus: Exodus 19:3b-6

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know God has commissioned them as a kingdom of priests.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled yet empowered to be representatives of God's kingdom to all people.



Hands - I want participants to communicate and demonstrate God's will and word to the nations.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 17 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever been chosen to represent a group or person? What responsibilities came with that election? [*Invite discussion.*]

As the name of the book implies, Exodus centers around the idea of a departure. Exodus begins with the decedents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as slaves in Egypt. But God rescued his people from slavery through a series of miraculous events. He sent plagues on the people of Egypt, and, at the same time, protected his own people from those plagues. Eventually, the Egyptian Pharaoh allowed the people of Israel to leave, but he changed his mind and followed his slaves into the wilderness. As Pharaoh's army pursued God's people, God drowned the army in the Red Sea. The people of Israel, now rescued, traveled to Mount Sinai, where Moses received God's law. But before God gave Moses the centerpiece of the law (what we call the Ten Commandments), he spoke to Moses about the identity of the people of God. What God told Moses about the identity of his people is today's lesson.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passages together.*]

In our passage for today, God expressed his desire to use the people of Israel as a kingdom of priests. As a kingdom, the people of God are God's way for *all* peoples to come to know him. In this passage, God called the people by three names. This lesson will focus on the second name, but the other two names are important as well.

The first name that God calls his people in this passage is "his treasured possession." Old Testament scholar Kaiser Walter says the idea here is that God's people were "treasures that he could move around and disperse as he pleased" (*Missions in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, 22). The Hebrew word is *segullah*. Six of the times this word is used in the Old Testament, it describes God's people. The other two times, it refers to the treasures of David and Solomon. When this term is used about God's people, God is demonstrating both his love for and authority over his people. By moving his treasure from one place to another, God was moving his witnesses (the people of Israel) into places where his will and word were not yet known.

So the first name God calls his people in this passage is "his treasured possession." We'll look at the second name in just a minute, but for now, let's look at the third name. The third name that God calls the people of Israel in this passage is "a holy nation." The concept of holiness is best thought of as "set apart." So when God called Israel to be a "holy nation," he called them to be set apart not only in their lives, but also in their service. From the call of Abram until now, God's plan was always to bless all the nations of the earth through blessing this particular people.

While the two names mentioned above are important, this lesson will focus on the second name that God called his people in this passage. God called them a “kingdom of priests.” There are two important aspects of that name: priests and kingdom. The role of a priest was to be a mediator, someone to communicate the will and word of God to the nations around them. The nation of Israel would have priests from within their nation who would have a special role, but by calling the entire people “a kingdom of priests,” God elevated even the common Israelite person to a role that would have been extremely rare in the ancient world. All of God’s people are part of his kingdom of priests.

God called his people to be his kingdom witnesses. As the people of God, they would serve as a depiction of God’s kingly rule to the nations around them. The way they interacted with one another, other peoples, and the entire created order would bear witness to the ethics, laws, and virtues of the kingdom of God. When we read the whole passage, with a focus on verse 4, we see that God reminded his people of his past actions. The command to obey his commands and to be his kingdom of priests was based on what God had already done. God effectively said that his people had already seen what he had done, so they should obey his commands and become his kingdom of priests. By grounding the commands in the context of what God had already done, God demonstrated the authority that they had as his people—as his kingdom of priests.

God wanted everything they had experienced in the Exodus to inspire and motivate his people to be a kingdom of priests to all nations. As a people called to serve the nations, the best way they could do so was by calling the nations to worship the one true God. As God’s treasured possession, a nation set apart, and a kingdom of priests, they could tell the other nations about their great holy and merciful God by being his representatives to all the peoples of the world.

In the New Testament, in 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle Peter quoted verse 6 from today’s passage. In referencing God’s words to Moses at Mount Sinai, Peter applied this kingdom-of-priests concept to the church. While most English translations of 1 Peter use the phrase “royal priesthood,” the idea is consistent with the sense of a kingdom of priests in Exodus. So the people of God continue to act as a kingdom of priests to all peoples today.

As God’s royal priesthood, the church is called to at least two tasks. First, the church is called to mediate the work of Christ to a lost and dying world. This work is the work of missions and evangelism. The church has the right, the responsibility, and the privilege to proclaim the gospel to all. Second, the church is called to serve God through worship in word and deed. This is the work of praise and adoration. Whenever we praise God, we are serving

him. Through our praise and adoration, we declare the truth that God alone is King of the universe.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

The use of kingdom language is common in the prosperity gospel movement. However, it is misused and twisted. For instance, Kenneth Copeland wrote a series of studies called "10 Days of Kingdom Prosperity." In this document, Copeland misinterpreted 1 Peter 2:9-10 by stating "darkness is lack, poverty and shortage." Copeland contended that since believers are part of the royal priesthood, they are no longer under the rule of darkness, and, therefore, not subject to poverty and lack. The implication is that poverty and lack (and sickness and disease) can be avoided if one is a member of the kingdom of God.

Another heretical group that misuses kingdom language is a "ministry" based in Harare, Zimbabwe, called Kingdom Prosperity Ministries. This group offers "permanent solutions to spiritual problems." Their website contains sermons like "How to Get Your Needs Met," "Benefits of Being Born Again," and "How to Dominate on Earth." The website also contains testimonies of individuals who have been helped by this ministry and, of course, an opportunity to give.

When groups like these two use kingdom language, they are NOT using it as the Bible does. Instead, they are twisting Scripture to make it mean what they want it to mean. As with many other false teachers, prosperity gospel teachers mix biblical truth with error, poisoning their audiences with false teaching.

How do we truly flourish?

Jesus is not only the King. He is the Servant King. When Jesus came as the incarnate God, he did not stop being God. He was fully God throughout his earthly life and ministry. In his incarnation, however, Jesus came as a humble servant. He described himself as "gentle and lowly in heart" and promised his followers, "you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:29 NIV). Author Dane Ortlund has written, "If we are asked to say one thing about who Jesus is, we would be honoring Jesus's own teaching if our answer is, gentle and lowly." The joy of Jesus is to serve.

As Christ followers, we are called to follow and imitate the one and true King Jesus Christ. One way that we follow and imitate Christ is by serving others. Our service to others can take several forms. We can pray for other believers. We can pray for lost friends and unreached people groups around the world. We can give to the cause of missions and to those in need. The most important ser-

vice that we can provide to others is to share the gospel with them. In doing so, we are agreeing with the apostle Paul who urged his readers to imitate him as he imitated Christ.

***On the list**, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What status do the names a “kingdom of priests” or a “royal priesthood” give us? What purpose do these names give us?
2. How is the concept of a kingdom of priests connected to the concepts of missions and evangelism?
3. How does being part of the royal priesthood affect the way you think about your life and ministry?
4. How do you feel to know that, as a Christ follower, you are included in God’s “royal priesthood”?
5. Since, as a believer in Christ, you are a member of a “royal priesthood,” or a “kingdom of priests,” how should you relate to non-Christians?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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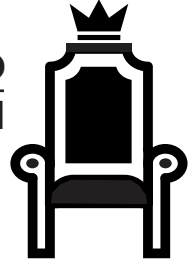
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We Are the Caretakers of God's Kingdom

Main Idea: God appointed us to be the caretakers of his kingdom.

Scripture Passage: Psalm 8:4, 6-8; Genesis 1:28

Scripture Focus: Psalm 8:4, 6-8

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know God has appointed them to be the caretakers of his kingdom.



Heart - I want participants to feel responsible for stewarding God's kingdom on earth.



Hands - I want participants to adopt habits and routines that demonstrate their God-given role as caretakers in God's kingdom.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 18 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever felt like something in creation held power over you? How did you find a solution? *[Invite discussion]*

Psalm 8 is a song that proclaims how great God is and how insignificant humankind is in comparison. But this psalm also mentions some important truths about God's purposes for human beings. We will focus our attention in today's lesson on these purposes.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passages together.]*

Verse four of Psalm 8 reminds us that we are small, particularly compared to God. But then something interesting takes place in the second part of this passage. After asking why God would consider humankind, the psalmist mentions some significant characteristics about human beings in verses 6 through 8.

Verse six says, "You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet" (NIV). This verse refers to humanity's rulership and dominion over all creation. The expression, "you put everything under their feet," refers to a practice in the ancient Near East during the times of the Bible. After a battle in the ancient Near East, the victorious king rode out onto the field of battle and sat upon a throne. His soldiers lay the vanquished king at the feet of the seated king. The triumphant king placed one foot over his conquered foe's throat. The symbolism was clear: the victorious king demonstrated his power of life and death over his defeated enemy.

Verses seven through eight on Psalm 8 then describe the extent of humankind's dominion over God's creation: the sheep and oxen and all the beasts of the field (v. 7), the birds of the air and the fish of the sea (v. 8). This passage refers to Genesis 1:28, when God spoke to the first man and the first woman. At creation God appointed humankind to "subdue" the earth, and to "rule over" the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every living thing that moves on the earth.

So we see that Psalm 8, referring to Genesis 1:28, tells us many things about God's greatness as well as humanity's role as God's caretakers. First, God is infinitely greater than human beings, far exceeding our capacity to understand. Second, human beings, male and female, are to exercise dominion over all the earth, including the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field. Last, this dominion is our responsibility before God to be caretakers of his creation according to his laws and standards. It is not a license to do whatever we please. Always, in whatever we do in and to this creation, we must first ask what it is that God wants us to do.

In the New Testament, stewarding the kingdom of God includes everything that we have already mentioned, only in ways that are higher and deeper than the Old Testament writers dreamed. When we sin, we desire something in the creation (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life) above God's will. At that moment, that part of creation rules over us. Just as when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, the order of creation becomes inverted and the creation usurps the role of ruler, dominating those who should exercise dominion over it. But, through Christ, we have been redeemed. Our status has been renewed. So the question we must ask ourselves then is, *Do we exercise dominion over the creation? Or do we let creation dominate us?* Through the gospel, we can reclaim our proper role as caretakers of God's creation. The created things need not dominate us.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

The prosperity gospel preachers also teach that we have dominion. However, the dominion they focus on is for this life only. Even though, at times, it seems like the prosperity gospel promises too much, as if the prosperity gospel preachers are promising things greater than the Bible promises, they aren't. As Southern Seminary president Albert Mohler says, they actually promise too little. The prosperity gospel may offer promises of dominion over demons, poverty, and sickness, but they claim that dominion only for now.

How do we truly flourish?

The promises of the Bible, the promises of Christ, are eternal. Christ promises us a treasure where moth and rust cannot destroy.

The prosperity gospel teaches that Jesus died for poverty and so on, but the Bible teaches that Christ died to redeem people, not bank accounts. Christ died to redeem souls, not merely bodies. Christ's death guarantees abundant life not merely now, but now and forevermore. Christ's death restores the image of God in us, so it restores us to our proper place of dominion and removes sin's dominion over us.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What are some specific examples (good or bad) of how the church reveals God's kingdom to the world through its stewardship of creation?
2. What do our personal habits and daily routines (good or bad) say about our stewardship of God's kingdom?
3. If we abuse alcohol or drugs, or even covet what someone else has, do we have dominion over that created thing or does it have dominion over us? How can we apply the gospel to that dominion?

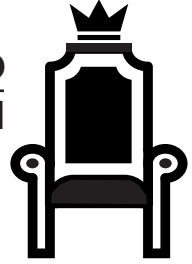
*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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Healing and Provision Are Compassionate Signs of God's Kingdom

Main Idea: We do not have to earn miracles. When God heals us or provides for us, he shows us his compassion and the abundance of his kingdom. When his kingdom is fully realized, everyone will have everything they need.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 15:31-39

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that God heals us and provides for us because he has compassion on us.



Heart - I want participants to feel overwhelmed by God's compassion for them.



Hands - I want participants to demonstrate God's kingdom on earth by compassionately meeting people's needs.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 19 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Think of a time when someone treated you with great kindness. What happened? How did their treatment of you affect how you felt about them? [*Invite discussion.*]

As we read in the Gospels, most of Jesus's ministry took place within the traditional borders of Israel. But in today's passage, Jesus was in the region of Decapolis, literally "ten towns," located just outside the borders of northern Israel off the Sea of Galilee. The towns that comprised Decapolis had a mostly Gentile, or non-Jewish, population. These Gentiles had often suffered Jewish discrimination in times past. But Jesus performed miracles and responded to the needs of the Gentiles just as he did among the Jews. The fact that Jesus, a Jew by birth, ministered among the Gentiles in their own territory spoke much to them about his character.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

In today's passage, Jesus was not only teaching and preaching to the crowds, but he was also meeting human needs. To be sure, Jesus's concern for the large crowd highlighted the sense of urgency and the importance he placed on meeting their needs. Such large crowds would have overwhelmed the sellers in the local marketplaces. More than likely, all the vendors combined could not have sold enough bread to feed so many people. Even more serious, it would likely have taken the crowd days to travel to enough locations to find enough food for everyone. It is no surprise, then, why the disciples were reluctant to feed such a large number. By any ordinary means at that time, such a task would be impossible. And yet, many women and children would have gone without eating that day had Jesus not intervened.

As important as meeting human needs is, Jesus performed this miracle for a deeper purpose. Through the miracle of multiplying loaves of bread and fishes, Jesus demonstrated the abundance in the coming kingdom. When the multitude ate until they were satisfied, Jesus showed them there is nothing lacking in his kingdom. However, this state of plenty would only come once Jesus had died on the cross and paid the penalty for sin, enduring the wrath of God, so that he could redeem not only all sinful humanity but also all of creation.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Neo-Pentecostal churches often require certain preconditions for people to receive healing or provision. These preconditions include "sowing seeds," exercising faith, "giving seeds," or giving offerings to the pastor. Sometimes people are required to

complete physical tasks such as bathing in the church, drinking special water or drinks. The Neo-Pentecostal pastors subtly and overtly minimize the sovereignty and power of God. Besides, these pastors and churches do not emphasize the compassion of God to bless and give material benefits freely to believers, sometimes even without asking. Instead of emphasizing the benevolence of God to freely provide material blessings, some Neo-Pentecostal pastors attract attention to themselves as “miracle workers” and the channels through which God provides for people.

How do we truly flourish?

God’s benevolence extends to all peoples in all places, and at the end of the age, Jesus will bring all humans to the messianic banquet. Remember that God made all of creation his kingdom, starting with the first man and woman living as God’s image and likeness in a garden. We call this *creation*. But our first parents rebelled against God. God then banished them from his presence. Before he did, however, God pronounced curses upon both the man and the woman that indicated how the creation often would dominate them rather than human beings exercising dominion over God’s kingdom of the creation. We call this the *fall*. Generations later, Jesus’s feeding of the 4,000 demonstrated how he will reverse the curses over creation, encouraging us to repent and believe in these promises. We call this *redemption*. The feeding of the 4,000 also anticipated a future banquet at the end of the age when the kingdom of God will be fully realized. We call this *completion*. At that time, there will no longer be any hunger, thirst, or illness. Such a day is coming with the return of Jesus when all believers in Christ will join him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The day is coming!

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What was the reason Jesus gave for performing the miracles in this passage? What does Jesus’s concern about the physical needs of the crowd tell you about why he heals or provides for people today?
2. What did the feeding of this crowd signify besides compassion for human needs?
3. How did Jesus announce the kingdom of God in our story today? How did Jesus’s message differ from the message of prosperity gospel preachers?

4. Does your local church have any form of social ministry that ministers to the physical needs of people? Why or why not?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

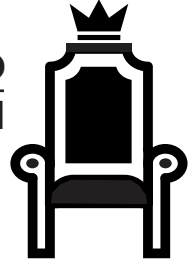
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20

At Christ's Return, Demonic Powers Will Be Destroyed

Main Idea: The resurrection of Jesus offers salvation to humankind and affirms the full establishment of God's kingdom in the future—when Christ will destroy all demonic powers and death, and God will rule supremely over the world.

Scripture Passage: 1 Corinthians 15:20–28

Scripture Focus: 1 Corinthians 15:24–25

OBJECTIVES



Head – I want participants to know that Christ's resurrection is proof that God's kingdom will be fully established at his second coming, but not before then.



Heart – I want participants to look forward to the full establishment of God's kingdom and rule.



Hands – I want participants to proclaim the gospel as the power over darkness and demonic powers.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 20 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

Have you ever waited for the return of a loved one? How did you prepare? [*Invite discussion.*]

In the beginning, God bestowed upon humans his image and glory, which enabled them to carry out God's will upon the earth. All nature was subject to humankind, who served as God's vice-regents upon the earth.

But Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and because of this fall from God's glory, humankind gave up the authority bestowed upon them by God. Instead, humans became depraved and inherited a sinful nature through Adam, who could no longer subdue nature and exercise authority successfully. Nature gained mastery over humans and their urges and made them subject to disobedience. The order of dominion was reversed.

But God had a plan to restore this order. His Son, Jesus Christ, came to the earth to redeem humankind and nature and to restore authority.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

As we learned in previous lessons about the image of God, Paul wrote chapter 15 of his letter to the church in Corinth to refute the Greek teaching that was creeping into the church—the false teaching that there is no resurrection of the body because the body is corrupt and subject to decay. In a progressive explanation beginning with the historical facts about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, including eyewitnesses, then personal, doctrinal, and practical proofs, Paul established the fact that resurrection is real in nature and that the resurrection of Jesus Christ established his messiahship. In fact, it was the risen Christ raised in power, who bore witness to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19), and who also guarantees the salvation of humans, because a dead person cannot offer any hope or salvation. Paul said that just as the fall of humankind through Adam brought sin and death into the world, Christ's atoning death brought a renewal of life and promoted the establishment of the kingdom of God. In today's lesson from this chapter, we see that in the future, when the kingdom of God is fully established, all principalities (demonic powers of whatever kinds) and lastly death will be put under the subjection of God's power.

In these verses we can see that Christ's second coming will mark the end of the current age and begin the establishment of God's rule. The kingdom, a concept developed in Jesus's teaching in the Gospels, is an end-time event when God's reign, which has been since before creation, will be brought to fulfillment. All hostile and

demonic powers will finally be brought to subjection, and Jesus will deliver all believers from their enslavement to the corruption of sin.

The reigning Christ will destroy all demonic powers, including death. (See 1 Cor 15:54 and 1 Thess 4:16-17.) All enemies, including demons and death itself, will be placed under Christ's feet. You may remember from a previous lesson that the metaphor "under his feet" comes from the culture of the ancient Near East. When a king defeated a rival king in battle, he set up his throne on the battlefield. The now defeated rival king would lie on his back before the conquering king with his throat exposed. The conquering king would place his foot over the throat of his defeated enemy. This symbolic action served as an illustration that the victorious king had defeated his enemy and had the power of life and death over his now beaten foe. In our verses today, the symbolic image illustrates Jesus's victory over sin, death, and even Satan and his evil forces. We anticipate this final victory at the end of this age, in a future time.

Then, Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father. This handing over of all authority indicates that, at the end of all things, God will be all in all. God will reign over all. His enemies will be no more. The kingdom of God portrayed by Israel, proclaimed by Jesus Christ, and inaugurated through the church, will finally reach its fulfillment at the end of the age.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Neo-Pentecostal preachers and teachers of the prosperity gospel teach that all authority and dominion is now available and fully restored to every Christian, and all one has to do is claim that authority and power. They proclaim victory over demons and evil spirits in a way that presumes the victory that will come at the end of the age. In so doing, they are claiming an authority and a power that belongs solely to Jesus Christ. Jesus will have ultimate victory over the powers of darkness at the end of the age, as Paul tells us in today's passage.

How do we truly flourish?

Christ came to earth to die for humanity so that he could pay the price for our sin and redeem us from its power and dominion. Because Christ triumphed over sin and death on the cross, we now inherit the benefits of Christ's victory, but only in part because God has yet to fully restore the world anew. Until Christ comes back a second time, the kingdom of God is here but not yet fully realized.

So we should beware the power and authority over demons that prosperity teachers claim, and we should remember that this pow-

er does not indicate that a person has received salvation. Jesus says in Matthew 7:21–23 (ESV, emphasis added):

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

This passage indicates that there will be many at the final judgment who will claim they have a spiritual maturity that assures their entrance into heaven because they commanded demons. But Jesus said that on that day, he will tell them, “I never knew you.”

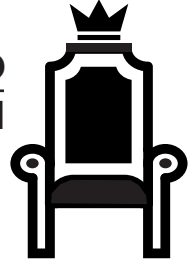
The mark of spiritual maturity is not casting out demons. Rather, it is a vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ, manifested by the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What does the expression “put all his enemies under his feet” mean?
2. How does Jesus’s ultimate victory in the future give us hope in the present day with all of its problems and sinful corruption?
3. Do the authority and power that Neo-Pentecostal preachers and prosperity gospel teachers claim follow the teachings of Scripture, or are they closer to African Traditional Religion? How so?
4. The gospel and salvation are how we exercise victory over the powers of darkness, not through the loud demonstrations of the prosperity gospel teachers. Explain why this is so.
5. Why is it that a person could cast out demons but could still be unsaved and even go to hell at the end of the age? (See Matt 7:21–23.)

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*



21

Christ's Kingdom Will Never End

Main Idea: All other kingdoms will fall, but Christ's kingdom will remain. He reigns over all.

Scripture Passage: Daniel 7:13-14

Scripture Focus: Daniel 7:13-14

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that Christ reigns over all.



Heart - I want participants to trust God's sovereignty and hope for the day when the reign of suffering, death, and evil will end.



Hands - I want participants to stop seeking their own kingdoms and proclaim Christ's kingdom instead.

Review the thesis statement and the second main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 2: We flourish as recipients and participants in the restoration of God's kingdom.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 21 on the arc with the throne icon.

DISCUSSION

What's something you remember from your childhood that doesn't exist anymore? What's something that seems to have always existed? Why are some things temporary and limited, and other things more universal? [*Invite discussion.*]

When we think of Daniel's story in the Old Testament, we may think of his night in a lion's den. Maybe we think about how he interpreted dreams or taught that God's kingdom would last forever. Or perhaps we think of his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and their deliverance from the fiery furnace. In all these stories of Daniel, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to his servants. But they are also stories of the servants' faithfulness to God. Daniel and his three friends found themselves in danger because they refused to worship anyone other than God. These stories remind us that God is our true and only God and king.

While we may be familiar with some stories about Daniel, most of us are not as familiar with the second half of the book about him. In the first six chapters of Daniel, we learn about his life, his exile, his faithfulness, and his rise to prominence. Chapter 7 begins the section of prophecy. The key element of prophecy is not telling the future, though that may occur, but rather the key element is communicating a message from God. When the prophet speaks, he speaks for God. Often the prophet is not telling the future, but even when he does, he does so because God has revealed it to him. The emphasis of the prophet is God, not himself.

Daniel 7 is one of those times when the prophet tells the future. This chapter is full of future prophecy. God lays out his entire redemptive plan in Daniel 7. Some scholars say that Daniel 7 is the most comprehensive prophecy of the future world in the Old Testament, and maybe even in the whole Bible.

Before we examine that prophecy, though, we need to understand one more aspect of the book of Daniel. Daniel is a prophetic book, but it is also an apocalyptic book. That just means that Daniel communicates his message through signs and symbols. Part of the challenge of the interpreter is to understand the meaning of these signs and symbols. We want to understand what Daniel meant then so we can understand what the text means now. As we read, we'll see that, through the signs and symbols, Daniel gives us God's message that his kingdom will be victorious over all other kingdoms.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

In Daniel 7 we are exposed to some of the symbolism of apocalyptic literature. We see four great beasts coming up out of the sea. The beasts were fantastical. Imagine a lion or a leopard with

wings! Or a beast that had ten horns and iron teeth! Those sound scary. They sound dangerous and powerful. That's the point. They aren't literal beasts. They are symbolic of kingdoms.

We could spend a lot of time discussing which animals represent which kingdoms and why. To be certain, these were specific kingdoms in Daniel's mind when he wrote his prophecy. However, there's some debate over which kingdoms are represented. Thankfully, it is not necessary to know all the kingdoms to understand the message. It is clear that four powerful and vicious kingdoms arise, each worse than the one before. It's not a pleasant picture.

But the prophecy is meant to comfort the people of God. They were going to go through persecution and suffering, but their God would be victorious. Different kingdoms would rise, but God, the Ancient of Days, takes away the dominance of the other kingdoms. His kingdom remains!

That's the theme of this vision. Other kingdoms may seem to have power and dominion, but the kingdom of God is greater than all these. The kingdom of God has dominion over all other kingdoms. A glorious king establishes a glorious kingdom. That's the theme of the vision.

We know this is the theme because the Bible tells us so in verses 15-28. So we can be confident that God's kingdom is greater and that he will deal out justice. But we also note that the other kingdoms are allowed to reign for a while. We note that they are allowed to deal out suffering and persecution to God's people. For a while, it may seem like the kingdoms of this world are winning, but the kingdom of God will be victorious. The kingdom of God will overcome.

How can we be confident of this? Look again at verses 13-14. First, we see the Ancient of Days (God) giving dominion to the "son of man." Who is the son of man? In Daniel 7 we see this term refer to one who is given a kingdom. This one is greater than the beasts and enthroned with God to reign forever. But notice, it is not just that the son of man is given an eternal kingdom with eternal dominion and eternal glory, but he is also given a people, a people from all nations and languages.

Hopefully, your mind is starting to make connections between the son of man mentioned here and Jesus. Did you know Son of Man was Jesus's favorite title for himself (Matt 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; 22:69)? This title speaks to Christ's humanity and his heavenly status. But the Bible also tells us that because of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, he has been exalted with a name above all others (Phil 2:9). We are told the kingdoms of the world will pass away and become his kingdom,

which lasts forever (Rev 11:15). We are also told that his death and resurrection have secured for him a vast number of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7:9).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Despite the fact that Daniel clearly expected suffering to come to the people of God, the prosperity gospel preachers tell us that suffering is a sign of a lack of faith and a sign of disobedience. However, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and even our Savior, Jesus Christ, suffered. They suffered not because of a lack of faith or a lack of obedience but because they did have faith and they were obedient. They had the faith to stand against the kingdoms of the earth and focus on the kingdom of God. That faith caused them suffering. But they did not lose hope, because they knew the suffering of this age didn't compare to the glory of the coming kingdom.

But Neo-Pentecostal teachers focus only on the now. They tell us we can live our best life now. They tell us that we should prosper now. But that's the opposite of what we see in Daniel and the Scripture. The kingdom is a future kingdom, experienced now, but not fully.

Furthermore, the Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers focus on our kingdoms, our glory, our wealth. In doing so, they shift the focus from God and his kingdom. Daniel makes it clear that it is not our kingdom. It is the kingdom of God. God reigns. Christ is given the dominion and the glory. In summary, Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers tempt believers to seek their own kingdoms and vilify those who suffer.

How do we truly flourish?

We know that, just like our Savior, in this life we may experience temporary suffering, but we have the confidence of something better (Rom 8:18). We know this is not our best life. We don't focus on building up treasure on earth (Matt 6:19-21). We look to God and his kingdom. We can rest in knowing that we are part of the kingdom of God, even if we are rejected by present kingdoms. We can know that our aim is to proclaim the kingdom of God, not try to build our own kingdom. We can rest in knowing that our God reigns and will reign forever.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. How does the suffering of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Jesus Christ challenge the prosperity gospel preachers' claim that suffering is a sign of a lack of faith and disobedience?
2. What is the difference between the kingdom of God and all other kingdoms, according to Daniel's teachings?
3. How do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers shift the focus from God and his kingdom to us and our own kingdoms?
4. Why is it important to focus on God's kingdom rather than building up treasure on earth?
5. How can we resist the temptation to seek our own kingdoms and instead proclaim the kingdom of God in our daily lives?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the second main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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The Temple of God



We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.



TEMPLE OF GOD CREATION

22

God's Presence Is What We Need

Main Idea: God is present among his people, and in his presence is a relationship, provision, and responsibility.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 2:8-17; 3:24

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that God's presence with them brings them a relationship with him, his provision, and their responsibility.



Heart - I want participants to feel comforted by God's presence.



Hands - I want participants to rest in God's presence so they can fulfill their responsibilities as image-bearers in his kingdom.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

As you begin this lesson, you can give each person a blank copy of the redemptive arc with the temple icon at the top (Appendix 3), hang an enlarged blank copy of the redemptive arc where you can write on it and everyone can see it, or draw an arc that you can write on as you teach the lesson. Label the four acts of the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Creation section next to the number 22.

DISCUSSION

Tell of a time when you were hurting or grieving, and someone just sat with you. How did their presence comfort you? [*Invite discussion.*]

The language used in Genesis 2 and 3 to describe the garden of Eden is repeated in the language used throughout the Old Testament to describe the temple and the tabernacle. This can be seen in the descriptions of the rivers (Gen 2:10; Ps 46:4; Ezek 47), the precious stones (Gen 2:12; Ex 25:7; 28:9, 20; 35:9, 27; 39:6-13), the presence of cherubim (Gen 3:23-24; Ex 25:18-22; 1 Kings 6:23-35), and even the trees (Gen 2:9; 1 Kings 6:29-35). In fact, theologian and professor J. Daniel Hays referred to Eden as "God's Garden Temple."

Today's lesson will focus on several key repeated themes. First, we will see that just as the garden of Eden was a place of God's special covenant presence, so was the temple a place of his special presence. Second, we'll see that this presence included God's gracious provision for mankind through the tree of life. Third, we'll see that this presence was a relational presence. Finally, we will see that this relational presence was personal and covenantal and included responsibilities for mankind.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passages together.*]

Let's look at four themes we see in both the garden of Eden and the temple.

First, the garden and the temple were places of God's special covenantal presence. In Genesis, God established a covenant with Adam, the first man, and was present with him in a special way. Likewise, God made a covenant with Moses and the people of God on Mount Sinai and gave the instructions about the tabernacle as the dwelling place of God. The purpose of God's special dwelling with humanity in both the garden and in the temple is so that God's "people can be with him and worship him," Hays says.

Of course, God is present everywhere, so when we speak about God's presence in the garden and in the temple, we need to give some explanation. The apologist Francis Schaeffer has encouraged us to think about light in our daily experiences. The light that fills a room in your house when you open the curtains is analogous to the omnipresence of God. The light of a laser beam that cuts through steel is like the intense presence of God in the garden or in the temple.

Second, we see that God provided for humanity both in the garden and in the temple. The temple, in fact, contained a loaf of bread called the "bread of Presence" (Ex 25:30). The bread of

Presence served several purposes. One of those purposes was to remind the people of God of his presence among them. Additionally, the bread of Presence also served to feed the physical hunger of the priests. Similarly, the tree of life in the garden was God's provision for the life of the first man. In fact, God provided the man, who served God as a kind of king-priest, "every tree pleasing in appearance and good for food" (Gen 2:9 CSB).

Third, God's presence in the garden was not God's mere presence. It was a relational presence. Genesis 3:8 says that God "walked" with the man and the woman. Schaeffer wrote, "In the garden, in the cool (or the wind) of the day, there was open fellowship, open communication . . . between God and man." Of course, this specific incident of God walking in the garden was after mankind's fall into sin, and the fact that he came to walk in the garden with the man and the woman is a clear indication that God desired to continue a relationship with them even after they broke that relationship.

God was also relationally present in the tabernacle and the temple. He made those places his special dwelling place to relate to his covenant people. Throughout the Bible, we see that God's relationship with humankind is based on a deep and abiding love for his people. This relationship leads to our final point.

Fourth, God's relational presence included covenantal responsibilities for humanity. In the temple, this responsibility was recounted in the Law. In Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, God gave many detailed instructions about his expectations for the behavior of his people. But before God gave those instructions, here in Genesis the responsibilities of God's people were made very clear and simple, and there was only one restriction. The man was given the responsibility to work in the garden and watch over it (Gen 2:15). God's one restriction was not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Now let's contrast the four points above with prosperity gospel teachings.

First, while biblical Christianity emphasizes that the presence of God is our ultimate need, the prosperity gospel emphasizes our material need. The prosperity gospel teaches that our greatest needs are physical. Some of these false teachers emphasize wealth accumulation. Others teach that true faithful believers should never get sick or have any suffering in their lives. These false teachers' entire ministries are taken up with avoiding suffering and gaining wealth rather than avoiding sin and glorifying Christ.

Second, biblical Christianity emphasizes that we should rely on God for our daily bread. But the prosperity gospel teaches that we should seek prosperity and abundance. Instead of being satisfied with the spiritual blessings of God in the sacrifice of Christ and in the material blessings of our daily bread, prosperity gospel teachers say we should always seek more and more financial and material blessings.

Third, while biblical Christianity emphasizes that God's presence brings a relationship with humankind, the prosperity gospel seeks God's presence only for material and physical gifts. Prosperity gospel teachers say that we should pursue God because he is the provider of cars and cash. In the world of the prosperity gospel, God is a divine ATM machine.

Fourth, biblical Christianity emphasizes that humankind has responsibilities in our covenant with God. The prosperity gospel says that our only responsibility is to prosper. Instead of emphasizing obedience and faithfulness like the Bible does, the prosperity gospel teaches us to focus on our material needs and our desire to avoid suffering.

How do we truly flourish?

Biblical Christianity teaches that the presence of God in our lives is enough. We do not come to God for what he can give us but for who he is. The images of the tree of life in the garden and the bread of Presence in the temple and tabernacle have been fulfilled in Christ, who is the bread of life. Jesus says, "Come to me, ... and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29 ESV).

On the list (Appendix 5: What Can We Say?), ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. How are the garden of Eden and the temple similar?
2. Much of the prosperity gospel either states or implies that you need God's presence in your life so you will prosper materially and in your health. How does that perspective contrast with biblical teaching?
3. As you consider the truth that now God's presence is among his people—the church—how do you feel?
4. Since the holy God has promised to dwell among his people, how should we live?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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Hays, J. Daniel. *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.

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23

Our Sin Broke Our Relationship with God

Main Idea: Our sin broke our relationship with God, and only Jesus can restore it.

Scripture Passage: Genesis 3:1-24

Scripture Focus: Genesis 3:8a, 24

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that only Jesus can restore their relationship with God.



Heart - I want participants to feel grateful that Jesus restores their relationship with God.



Hands - I want participants to seek a relationship with God more than his power and blessings.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Fall section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 23 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

How are relationships broken? What is required to restore those relationships? [*Invite discussion.*]

In the beginning, God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, to be holy and happy. He intended for them to live in the beautiful garden that he prepared for them and to live in relationship with him. He created the garden of Eden to be the place where human beings would live in fellowship with him.

As we've learned in previous lessons, the garden of Eden functioned as a sort of temple for Adam and Eve. A temple is a building in which heaven meets earth so that human beings may commune with the divine in some way. Usually, worshipers offer sacrifices or prayers to communicate with the divine. But Adam and Eve did not have to do these things. Instead, they could see God face to face and communicate with him directly.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Genesis 3:8 says that Adam and Eve could "hear God walking in the garden." Clearly, they were accustomed to God's visits with them. But their relationship with God changed dramatically after they sinned against him. They had done exactly what he had forbidden them to do, because they desired to be like God. Immediately, their relationship with God was broken. Notice in verse 8 how Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of God when they heard him walking. Fear replaced joyfulness. Shame entered the relationship as well. But that was not the only result of their disobedience.

God prevented them from eating the fruit of the tree of life. Many people wonder why God wanted to prevent Adam and Eve from eating this fruit. It's possible that the fruit of the tree of life was meant to ratify or "make official" a relationship with God that would be eternal. To prevent this action, God kicked our first parents out of the garden. Since the garden was the place where our first parents would fellowship with God, this act was very sad. It meant that human beings could not relate to God face to face anymore. The relationship was broken. And human beings could not do anything to repair what was lost.

Here we see a story of paradise lost. We see a story of a broken relationship. It's more than a sad story; it is tragic. God's good creation was now God's cursed creation—including the man and the woman.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

The prosperity gospel teachers rightly understand that human beings and this world have inherited many curses, as Genesis 3:16-19 shows us. But these prosperity gospel preachers and Neo-Pentecostal teachers proclaim a message that is all about reversing the curses. They tell people how they can live a life that is filled with spiritual power, a life that is blessed and free from fear. What they fail to understand is that all the bad things that we see in the world first came about because our relationship with God was broken. Human beings do not have a proper relationship with God, because we have inherited a sinful nature from our first parents who disobeyed God.

How do we truly flourish?

Though the false teachers of the prosperity gospel offer us all kinds of ways to obtain spiritual power and blessing, there is, in fact, only one way: a restored relationship with God is what allows spiritual, and sometimes material, blessings to come to us. In this age, before Jesus Christ returns to make all things new, we will still encounter suffering, disease, and broken relationships because of sin. But Jesus restores our relationship with God and promises a day in which all the bad effects of sin will be done away with completely. We await that day when we will no longer face the painful results of our first parents' sin and rebellion against God.

But even more so, we should seek a right relationship with God above all else. We would miss the point if the only reason we sought a right relationship with God was to gain spiritual power and blessings. A relationship with God is the blessing above all other blessings.

Jesus restores us to a right relationship with God through the gospel. We understand that God loves us even though we are sinners and rebels against his law (Rom 3:23; 5:8). But we are all still sinners who deserve death for our disobedience against God (Rom 3:23; 6:23). Jesus Christ died on the cross to take the penalty that we deserved for our sin (1 Cor 15:2-4). When Jesus rose from the grave, he indicated that he had won the victory for us. Now, by confessing Jesus Christ and believing in him, we can have a restored relationship with God once again (Rom 10:9).

Do you want a right relationship with God? Apart from Jesus Christ, none of us can have a relationship with God. We are all outside the garden. But Jesus makes it possible for us to be in a good relationship with God once again and for all time. Praise God for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ!

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. Why do you think most pagan religions have temples?
2. Why do most people act as if they must do something to satisfy God or many gods before they can speak with him?
3. What happened when Adam and Eve heard God walking in the garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit? What did God do because of their disobedience?
4. What do prosperity gospel preachers fail to teach and preach in their messages about spiritual power and blessing? What must happen before God will bless us spiritually?
5. How do we restore our relationship with God? What has Jesus done for us that we cannot do for ourselves?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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24

The Proud Cannot Dwell with God

Main Idea: If we take credit for what God has done, we will not be allowed to dwell with him. God will cast out those who claim the worship that God alone is worthy of.

Scripture Passage: Ezekiel 28:1-19

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 28:13-15

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know they would have nothing without God's grace.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled by all that God has given them.



Hands - I want participants to humbly worship God.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Fall section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 24 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Has anyone ever taken credit for something you did? How did you feel about that? Have you ever taken credit for something someone else did? Why did you want the credit? [*Invite discussion.*]

Today we'll read about someone who tried to take credit for what God had given him and how God responded.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

Today's passage presents the king of Tyre in his former high and honored state and in his subsequent downfall. The prophet Ezekiel said the king was in Eden (v. 13) and compared him to Adam and Eve, who were humanity in its most godlike form. This does not mean that the king of Tyre literally lived in the garden of Eden, but his situation in Tyre was as safe and as pleasant, as delightful as Adam and Eve's was in the garden of Eden. Ezekiel used the garden of Eden imagery to explain the love of God for the king of Tyre. Then Ezekiel compared the king of Tyre to a priest in the temple when he said the king was covered in the precious stones that resembled the stones in the breastplate of the high priest (v. 13). Ezekiel also compared the king of Tyre to the cherubim carved over the ark of the covenant in the temple (v. 14), where God promised to meet with his people (Ex 25:22). The cherubim reference also alluded to the cherubim who guarded the garden of Eden. Then Ezekiel linked the imagery of God's presence in the temple even more closely with the imagery of the garden when he said the king walked back and forth amidst the stones (v. 14) just as God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. In both places, the temple and the garden, God dwelled among his people who worshiped him.

But tragically, just as in the garden of Eden, God found sin in the king of Tyre (v. 15). The king boasted in his wisdom and understanding, which he claimed brought him wealth (vv. 4-5). He claimed he was a god (v.2). So God cast him out from "the holy mountain of God," promising that he would die. God's punishment on the king of Tyre reveals God's hatred of pride. We also find in the New Testament that God "opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6 ESV).

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Sadly, much of what we see in Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers resembles the pride of the king of Tyre. They present themselves as gods who have gained riches through their wisdom and understanding (vv. 2-5). They fail to acknowledge that they are mortals, and everything they have has been given to them by the grace of God.

How do we truly flourish?

By combining the imagery of the garden with the imagery of the temple, Ezekiel confirmed that the garden of Eden was a temple where God dwelled with his people who worshiped him. Similarly, God's church now represents his garden-temple, where he dwells among those of us who worship him. We are his priests, his representatives in his creation as his image-bearers. The diverse gifts we receive by God's grace should compel us to serve him with a humble heart. We, the ministers of God, should see ourselves as recipients of God's mercy and respond by serving him humbly and relating to our fellow human beings with meekness.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What kind of relationship with God does Eden symbolize in today's Scripture passage?
2. Why do you think the descriptions of the garden of Eden and the temple are combined in this passage?
3. Like the king of Tyre, we too can become proud and boastful. What are some things you're tempted to boast in?
4. How do you think God wants you to respond to all that he's given you?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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TEMPLE OF GOD REDEMPTION

25

God's Presence Requires Holiness

Main Idea: God promises to dwell among his people if we live according to his ways, but we can't. So Christ makes us holy.

Scripture Passage: 1 Kings 6-7

Scripture Focus: 1 Kings 6:11-13

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that Christ can make them holy so they can dwell with God.



Heart - I want participants to feel grateful that Christ has become the ultimate sacrifice to make them holy.



Hands - I want participants to worship God in light of his worthiness and Christ's sacrifice.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 25 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Can you think of a time when someone sacrificed something for you? What did they give up? Why were they willing to do that? How did that affect your relationship with them? [*Invite discussion.*]

The story of the construction of the temple goes back to the time when King David reigned. Second Samuel 7:1-12 records the story of the covenant God made with David promising to carry on David's line forever. However, God told David he would not be the one to build a house for his dwelling. So David made plans for the construction, but it was his son Solomon who oversaw the construction of the temple once he became king.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

God allowed Solomon to build his temple. Solomon used the best materials, and he employed the best workers. They were meticulous about the details of the construction, and they added the best decorations. Then the Lord said to Solomon that if he carried out God's regulations and obeyed all his commands, God would fulfill his promises and live among the people (1 Kings 6:11-13).

The extravagance and beauty of the temple reflected the paradise of Eden. The temple, like the tabernacle before it, was meant to be the place where God met with his people as he used to walk with Adam and Eve in the garden. Just as the garden was God's wonderful creation where God manifested his presence with humanity in the beginning, the temple that King Solomon built became God's dwelling place among his people (1 Kings 6:11-13). The Lord promised that if they obeyed God's commands, his people would know his fellowship and protection. But after they experienced God's presence for a while, just like Adam and Eve, they disobeyed.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

As we read about the temple and the requirement for holiness, we realize the splendor of the temple was not the gold but the presence of God. The Scripture focuses on God's people dwelling with him. Holiness leads us to God, not simply to the blessings of God. God is not just seen as the giver of prizes. God is the prize. To be able to dwell with him, is the greatest gift that the child of God can receive.

However, for the prosperity teacher, God is not the prize. God is the means to the prize. The false teachers encourage people to be right with God not so they can be holy, but because being right with God guarantees health and riches, they claim. Kenneth Hagin, a prominent teacher in the prosperity movement, said in his book *How to Be Led by the Spirit of God*, "The Lord said to me, ... 'if you

learn to follow that inner witness, I will make you rich.'" His emphasis was on getting rich. He believed that following God would help people get to that goal. As Robert Tilton, another prominent teacher of prosperity, stated in his book *God's Word about Prosperity*, "I do not put my eyes on men, but on God who gives me the power to get wealth."

Sadly, the aim of Tilton and other prosperity teachers is not to know God, but to use and manipulate God. They want God because they want his blessings. They want God because they want to be healthy or to be rich. They don't want God because he is God but because they believe they can manipulate God into giving them wealth and health.

How do we truly flourish?

Scripture teaches us that God himself is our reward. But regrettably, as sinners, we have turned our backs on God, and our sin makes us people with whom God cannot dwell. We lost his holy presence in the garden.

From the beginning, though, God showed us that a sacrifice of a blameless, unblemished life would pay the price for our sin, make us holy, and restore our relationship with God. He showed us this sacrificial exchange when he killed the animal in the garden to make coverings for Adam and Eve when they were ashamed, and he showed us this exchange in the sacrifices that were made in the tabernacle and the temple for generations. And yet, these sacrifices were never enough. God could not dwell with his people.

That is why Jesus came to us. He gave himself as the blameless, unblemished sacrifice (Mark 1:24, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5), the perfect sacrifice to end all sacrifices for our sin. What the temple could not accomplish, Christ did. "It is finished," he said. At the cross, Jesus took on our sin and our punishment for our sin. And in exchange, he gave us his holiness (2 Cor 5:21). But just like the sin was not his, the righteousness is not ours. It is Christ's, who attributes his holiness to us. He makes us holy so God can dwell with us.

Christ died to take on our sins so that we could take on his holiness. Because of this great exchange, we receive the reward we don't deserve—God himself. We can be with God Almighty. We can talk with him, walk with him, and worship him. This is our aim. This is our goal—to dwell with God. What a prize! What a treasure! (Matt 6:19-21) Thank you, Jesus!

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. Why did God demand obedience as a condition for his presence?
2. Are you worshiping God appropriately? If not, what could you do differently?
3. Has God promised to be with us in these days? How would you explain to someone how God makes his presence known to people today?
4. What personal steps can you take to experience the presence of God in your life?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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TEMPLE OF GOD
REDEMPTION

26

God Will Dwell with Us Again

Main Idea: God's presence left the temple because his people were disobedient, but Jesus offers us a better presence than the temple.

Scripture Focus: Exodus 40:34-35; Ezekiel 10:18-19

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that Jesus has conquered the sin that drove them out of God's presence.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled in God's presence.



Hands - I want participants to abandon their unholy ways and seek the presence of the holy God.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 26 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

How do young children feel when their parents have to leave them for a time? How do parents feel when their children move away?

[Invite discussion.]

After God rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments so they would know how to live as his holy nation and kingdom of priests, he spoke to them about making a tent where he would meet with them. This tent was called the tabernacle. The final chapter of the book of Exodus tells the story of how the tabernacle was completed. We see that God was there with his people.

Ezekiel, however, tells a different story that happened many generations later. In the first chapter, Ezekiel saw a vision of God's glory. Then God commissioned Ezekiel to be a prophet and a watchman to warn the rebellious people of Israel. Ezekiel warned God's people about the coming of the day of the Lord and the judgment that would come with it. Then in Chapters 8-11, God's glory departed from both the temple and Jerusalem.

Our lesson today is about how God came to dwell among his people and then left because of their disobedience, but he promised to come again.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scriptures passage together.]*

To set a foundation, we will primarily focus on Exodus 40, but at the end we will contrast it with what occurs in Ezekiel. Make sure you keep both in mind. Overall, we know that in the book of Exodus God delivered his people, but when he delivered them from Egypt, they took their sin with them. So even though God dwelt with them, they were not holy enough. They could not be. And their sin often drove them apart from God. They needed redemption. They needed complete restoration.

Exodus 40 highlights three major points. First, the Lord God kept his promise to dwell in a special way among his people (25:8; 29:44-46) when his glory filled the tent of meeting (the tabernacle). Second, the Lord's character and holiness were revealed through the tent of meeting (the tabernacle). Third, the Lord promised to guide the people of Israel on a journey into the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let's talk about these three points in more detail.

First, the Lord God kept his promise to dwell in a special way among his people. In Exodus 25, God had given instructions to Moses, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." Then again in Exodus 29, God declared to Moses, "I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and

his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God" (Ex 29:44-46 ESV). By chapter 40, we see that God kept his promise.

Second, the Lord's character and holiness were revealed in the tabernacle. Much could be written about the symbolism of the tabernacle. Let's just consider a few symbols. The purple cloth symbolized God's royalty. The blue was a symbol of God's divinity. Notice also that the closer one moved to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable the metals became. Bronze was the furthest away, then silver, and then finally gold adorned the place of God's holy presence. Other symbols reminded the people of Eden—God's dwelling place. For instance, the entrance faced east. We see more reminders of Eden in the lampstand and the laws that represent the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Third, the tabernacle was a tent. Tents are not permanent buildings. The tabernacle was not a perpetual structure in a single place. It was meant to be mobile and impermanent. Throughout the book of Numbers, the people of God followed him as he moved them from place to place. For forty years, throughout their wilderness wanderings, the people set up the tabernacle whenever they were instructed to stop. This mobility was an indication of its temporary nature. As the people were living through that experience, and as we read about the tabernacle in the book of Exodus today, we are reminded that something more is coming. We are pointed forward to something greater than the tabernacle. The African Study Bible's comments on these verses encourage Christians to "walk at the pace of the all-knowing Lord." As inheritors of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we know that we walk in that way by following Christ. Let us be found faithful to walk with him.

But the Israelites were not faithful to walk with God. Ezekiel's story shows us that they sinned against God. And, because they did so, the glory of the Lord departed, the cherubim departed, and the people were exiled to the East. That last part reminds us of Adam and Eve being kicked out of the garden, the cherubim set as guardians, and the man and the woman living out of the presence of God. This is what occurred in Ezekiel too. The image of God's glory departing to the East reminds a careful reader or hearer that their disobedience has caused God's special presence to depart before.

The image of the glory of God also points the reader forward to a much more comforting reality—Jesus the Messiah. After he had been betrayed, tortured, and murdered, Jesus rose from the dead. After his resurrection, he appeared to his disciples, and then he departed to be with the Father. You will remember that Jesus

ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives. He also promised to return to that same place—east of the city of Jerusalem. Ultimately, God's lovingkindness in keeping the promise he made will have victory, even over our sinful behaviors. God's covenant faithfulness to keep his promise to return is stronger than the disobedience of God's people.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

We saw in Ezekiel that God is free to choose when he departs from his people. In today's passage, God departed because he was offended by the sins of the people, who were committing idolatry and being disobedient. But the prosperity gospel teaches that humans can command God to do their will. In his book, *God, Greed, and the (Prosperity) Gospel*, Costi Hinn wrote that these false teachers twist and distort the Bible in a way that "makes God a cosmic banker in charge of dispensing your wishes." While we should commend confident faith, we must also acknowledge that presumption is not faith. Presuming that God will do as we demand is a deadly sin. We certainly must beware anyone who presumes to command God with statements like "I command you, Holy Spirit, to" The Bible teaches that God is free to act as he wants.

The prosperity gospel and Neo-Pentecostalism also teach that victory is earned through our words of faith. This concept is sometimes called making a positive confession and contends that God is bound by our verbal utterances. In truth, power is not in our words but in the Word—Jesus Christ. As the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, he won ultimate victory over sin and then ascended to the right hand of the Father.

The prosperity gospel preachers further seek to control and manipulate the spirit world by placing undue emphasis on spiritual powers and place. The only truly worthy obsession in the life of a believer is Jesus Christ, so when false teachers encourage their hearers to understand God and his will by seeking to know the movements and activities of angels, demons, miracles, and other "spiritual" activity, they take the believers' eyes off the Bible. Furthermore, the prosperity gospel overemphasizes the role of place in the Christian life. This is reflected in the names that are often used for their places of worship, which are often called tabernacles and temples. Christians must avoid the mistake of substituting the word and even the concept of the church building or meeting place with the word *tabernacle*. God does not dwell in a building. God lives in his people.

How do we truly flourish?

As Christian believers, we are in Christ. As such, since we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, we, the church, are the dwelling place of God. Our physical location is secondary to this primary truth. Christ is undoubtedly the fullest and final revelation of God, and he is the place where man encounters God through sacrifice. In fact, compared to the sacrifices in the tabernacle and the temple, "Christ, through his better sacrifice, provides better cleansing, better holiness, and better access to the presence of God, thus providing better worship, fellowship, encounter, and life with God," says professor J. Daniel Hays. In today's world, we encounter Christ in the written word of God—the Bible. And the Bible teaches that Jesus's victory over sin and death was demonstrated by his resurrection and ascension from the Mount of Olives—east of Jerusalem (Acts 1:9–11). Now we wait for him to return.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. Since God kept his promise to come and dwell among his people in the tabernacle, how should we respond to the promises of God in the Bible?
2. How should you think about God's presence and dwelling place?
3. As you consider the truth that God's dwelling place is no longer in a place like the tabernacle, how do you feel?
4. Since God's dwelling place is among his people, how important is it to gather with other Christians regularly for worship, teaching, and mutual encouragement? What do you need to adjust in your life to demonstrate this importance?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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TEMPLE OF GOD
REDEMPTION

27

Jesus Is the Temple among Us

Main Idea: God fully revealed himself to us through Jesus Christ, who dwelled among us as fully God and fully man. We dwell with God in Jesus.

Scripture Passage: John 1:1-34

Scripture Focus: John 1:14; 32-33

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know God through Jesus Christ, who dwelled among us as fully God and fully man.



Heart - I want participants to be in awe that God revealed himself so fully through Jesus, a human among us. I want participants to long to see Jesus and know him.



Hands - I want participants to allow Jesus to reveal himself through him as they demonstrate grace and truth to the world.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 27 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Tell of a time when you met a famous or important person. Did you know they were famous or important? How excited were you to be able to spend time with them? [*Invite discussion.*]

Scholars have long prized the Gospel of John for its distinctive portrayal of Jesus. John portrays Jesus as the light of the world, the way, the truth, and the life, a good shepherd, the bread of life, the vine, and the resurrection. Also, the way John begins his Gospel is quite different from the way Matthew, Mark and Luke open theirs. Both Matthew and Luke begin their narratives with Jesus's birth, and Mark begins with Jesus's baptism, but John begins with "In the beginning God." Then John makes four important points about Jesus:

1. John describes the full deity of Jesus of Nazareth from the first verse of the first chapter and repeats this emphasis throughout the Gospel.
2. John interprets the life and teachings of Jesus in light of the needs of the early church.
3. John proclaims Jesus as equal with God.
4. John sees Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the one who has brought salvation to mankind.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

The book of John was written so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that by believing, they might have life in his name. This is John's clearly stated purpose for writing. However, there is a secondary purpose, which was to refute any heresy that might arise in any generation by those who deny Christ's deity, by those who deny Jesus's humanity, and by those who continue to look for a human messiah. John argues that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he is the Word that became flesh, and he is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

Jesus Christ became flesh. The Son of God came to Earth in the person of Jesus Christ. The word *flesh* is the same word that Paul used to describe man's nature with all its weakness and tendency to sin. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. The word *seen* literally means seeing with the human eyes. God becoming man can never be explained away as merely a vision of some men's minds and imagination. No, John said that he and other apostles actually saw the Word become flesh. John said that Jesus Christ dwelled visibly among us, and through this, God's glory was seen because Christ is the glory of God and the very embodiment of God. Also, through the incarnation of God's Son, it was made known that God

is full of grace and truth. Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of grace and truth.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

There are several contemporary teachers who hold the positions that Jesus Christ cannot be fully God and fully man. These teachers deny Christ's deity, Jesus's humanity, and his Messiahship.

How do we truly flourish?

John explains clearly in John 1:14 that Jesus Christ is the truly begotten Son of God, the very Word of God himself. Also, this same Jesus Christ is the Word of God that became flesh and dwelled among the people he created. He is as well the Messiah, the Savior of the whole world.

Then in John 1:32-33 we see the Spirit of God descend on Jesus at his baptism. When Jesus dwelled, or "tabernacled," among us, the Spirit descended on him much like it descended on the tabernacle and the temple. Jesus himself became the tabernacle or temple among us, the one in whom we can meet God.

There is no doubt that Jesus Christ is the perfect and eternal revelation of God to humankind. He is the way, the truth, and the life. Therefore, to have Christ is to have the whole of God, and to lose Christ is to lose the whole redemption plan of God.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. How is Jesus Christ both fully God and fully man who dwelled among us? How does this relate to the reality that Jesus is the temple of God?
2. What does the fact that Jesus is fully God and fully man mean for us today? Why is it important?
3. How would you respond to a prosperity gospel preacher who denies that Jesus is fully God and fully man?
4. John said Jesus was "full of grace and truth." How can we also be full of grace and truth? How can others see God revealed through Jesus in us?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

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TEMPLE OF GOD REDEMPTION

28

God's Spirit Dwells in Us

Main Idea: At Pentecost, God's Spirit descended and filled his people just as he had descended before when he filled the tabernacle and the temple. Now God's people are filled with his Spirit and are his living temple, filling the earth with his glory.

Scripture Passage: Acts 2:1-12

Scripture Focus: Acts 2:1-4

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know God's Spirit dwells in them so they can fill the earth with his glory.



Heart - I want participants to feel awestruck by God's Spirit in them.



Hands - I want participants to participate in the Great Commission, filling the earth with God's glory.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Redemption section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 28 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Think of a time when you saw something that left you in awe. What was it? What was your reaction to that feeling? [*Invite discussion.*]

Seven weeks (or fifty days) after God rescued his people from Egypt and led them safely through the Red Sea, he gave them the law at Mt. Sinai. For generations after God revealed himself at Mt. Sinai, the people commemorated this time by celebrating the annual Feast of Weeks. In the New Testament, they called this festival Pentecost, which literally means “fifty.” In the book of Acts, we see what happened when Jews from many lands gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Jesus’s resurrection. The disciples of Jesus had stayed in Jerusalem after his ascension into heaven because he had told them to wait there for power to descend from on high. He had told his disciples, “And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 NASB). He also said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NASB). So the disciples waited. Just as God’s people had waited for God’s revelation at Mt. Sinai, the followers of Jesus waited in Jerusalem. Again, God showed up on Pentecost.

Let’s take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

This event at Pentecost recalls multiple previous events: God giving the law on Mt. Sinai, his Spirit filling the tabernacle, and his Spirit filling the temple that Solomon built. But in this instance, the Spirit of God filled people.

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was a fulfillment of God’s promise. In the Old Testament, God told the prophet Jeremiah, “I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:33 NASB). Giving his people the Holy Spirit was his way of writing his law upon their hearts.

God sent his Spirit upon his people at Pentecost similarly to the way he gave them the law on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16–19. At Pentecost, the glory of God descended and filled the room in Jerusalem just as it had descended on Mt. Sinai. God’s presence descended on Mt. Sinai in a cloud with fire and smoke. The wind and the tongues of fire in Jerusalem resembled the presence of God on Mt. Sinai, where the thunder was likened to the voice of God.

Similarly, the Spirit’s descending on the believers and filling them at Pentecost resembled the descent of the Spirit when it conse-

crated the tabernacle and the temple that Solomon built. In Exodus 40:34 (NASB), "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Then in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 (NASB), "the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not rise to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."

Furthermore, when the disciples in Jerusalem spoke in the foreign languages of the people who had come from other countries, they demonstrated a reversal of the curse at Babel. In Genesis 11, God had confused the language so the people could no longer communicate with one another and "make a name for themselves." But now the people who had come from various lands heard the gospel of Jesus proclaimed, and each of them heard that message in his or her own language rather than in the native Aramaic of the disciples. Redemption had begun.

These new believers would return to their different lands throughout the known world. Filled with the Spirit of God, they would proclaim what they heard to the uttermost parts of the earth. In doing so, the glory of God would fill them as the new temple and, through them, fill the earth.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity preachers talk about the Holy Spirit primarily as a means for receiving power over financial circumstances, over disease, and for victory in life events. Some even invoke the power of the Holy Spirit against their enemies. One sincere but seriously mistaken individual advised a church member how she could "blast her enemies with Holy Spirit power!"

How do we truly flourish?

When we read Acts 2:1-12 in the light of Exodus 19:16-19 and Jeremiah 31:33, we learn that the Holy Spirit is more than what these Neo-Pentecostals and prosperity teachers say. The power that the Holy Spirit gives is a transformed life, a spiritual life that grants freedom from slavery to sin. Unlike what God gave Moses at Mt. Sinai, God's law is no longer written on stone tablets. Rather, the Spirit transforms our hearts at the moment we believe on Jesus Christ. Instead of tablets of stone, the Spirit writes God's law on our hearts. We now have the power to do what God wants us to do because the Holy Spirit gives us that power.

Human flourishing takes place through the Holy Spirit at both a community and an international level when Christ's followers spread his gospel to the farthest parts of the world, increasing the number of people who follow Jesus and have the Holy Spirit filling them as followers of Jesus. This increase in the kingdom of God

fills the world with God's glory as the Spirit fills people across the globe.

In Isaiah 6, the angels proclaimed that the whole earth was full of God's glory. The train of God's robe filled the inside of the temple in Isaiah's vision. The physical temple represented the world. Today, as believers spread the gospel message to the farthest parts of the earth, God's glory fills each new believer with the Holy Spirit. As the gospel spreads to every part of the world, God literally fills the whole earth with his glory as more Spirit-filled people call on his name and God's kingdom expands.

God once scattered people across the earth after confusing their languages (Gen 11). Now, Jesus Christ draws all people to himself through the Holy Spirit. We flourish as the kingdom of God covers the globe.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. How does what happened at Pentecost resemble the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, the dedication of the tabernacle, and the dedication of Solomon's temple?
2. What does the fact that believers themselves are the temple of God mean? How is it significant to us today?
3. In an earlier lesson, we saw that at Mt. Sinai God commissioned his people, "You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6 ESV). How does the speaking of tongues at Pentecost relate to God's commission at Mt. Sinai?
4. Has God's glory filled all the earth as he wants it to? If not, can the fullness of the blessings that are ours be experienced today? If not, what does that say to preachers and teachers of the prosperity gospel?
5. If we are the temple of God, and God wants his glory to fill the earth, how do we do this? (Consider Matthew 28:18-20.) What role does the Spirit of God play (Acts 1:8)?
6. What is one thing that you can do this week to participate in filling the earth with the glory of God?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

Bruce, F.F. "The Acts of the Apostles." In *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979.

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God's Glory Will Return to Us

Main Idea: The glory of our holy God will return to us again, and we will worship him appropriately.

Scripture Passage: Ezekiel 40:1-43:12; Revelation 21

Scripture Focus: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:1-12; Revelation 21:1-5, 9-11, 22-27

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know that God is holy, and yet he wants to dwell with them.



Heart - I want participants to feel humbled by God's holy presence and to desire to be holy like him. I want participants to offer their whole lives as worship to God.



Hands - I want participants to lead others to worship God appropriately.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 29 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Who is the most important person you can think of? Would the average person ever get to sit with him? Why or why not? How would you feel if you were allowed to spend a day with him?

[Invite discussion.]

When God's exiled people were living in devastation and despair, God promised he would dwell among them again. In the chapters preceding today's passage (Ezek 10-11), God's glory departed from the former temple in Jerusalem. But now God showed Ezekiel that his glory would return from the east to dwell in his nation once again and they would worship him as his holy people.

In a vision, God took Ezekiel to Jerusalem and led him on a tour of the future temple. The tour was conducted by a man, probably an angel, whose appearance was like bronze. The angelic being with Ezekiel had a measuring rod. He began by measuring the outer court and then the inner court. Ezekiel described in great detail this structure as he was led through. He wanted the people to see the great splendor God had planned for the faithful.

Let's take a closer look. *[Read the Scripture passages together.]*

Note the dramatic reversal of the departure of the Lord's glory. God declared the new temple to be the place of his throne, the place where he would live among his people. The new temple would become the visible reminder of Israel's relationship with God through his new covenant.

Ezekiel's vision of the future was intended to give encouragement in a time of much discouragement. The revelation that the temple would be rebuilt, to which God's glory would return and in which the nation would worship their Lord, was a message of hope. It was a vision of God's kingdom. Note that the significance of this vision of God's glory was so important that the Lord himself interpreted it to Ezekiel (43:6). The temple was to be God's throne and residence among Israel forever (43:7). The glory of God would fill the temple, and God's holiness would permeate the entire temple complex. In addition, the temple complex would reflect God's holiness through the separation brought about by its design, which would cause the people of that day to be ashamed of their sins.

Whether the temple was literal or symbolic, it seems there is something in this vision for the reader today. Although our world may be in ruins and life may be difficult, God's true home is flawless, beautiful, and holy. And believers will someday share in the ultimate presence of the holy God.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

One of the main errors of the prosperity gospel is the short-sighted focus on the future as if it were now. The Neo-Pentecostals twist the promises of God that are to come and make them promises for now. For example, in this passage, Ezekiel is speaking of what will occur in the future, both for his audience and, in some sense, even for us. There will be holiness; there will be full restoration; there will be no more suffering.

While we can say confidently these promises have been fulfilled in Christ (2 Cor 1:20), we also must realize we live in a state of already-but-not-yet. We have the guarantee of these promises but have not yet entered into them fully. We are holy but are still being made holy. We dwell with God but still look to the day when we will dwell with him. We are restored to God, but we are still being restored. This is because we presently still live in a fallen world. We still live in a world affected by sin. Prosperity gospel and Neo-Pentecostal teachers miss this already-but-not-yet point. They declare you can experience all these promises fully right now.

They teach that the believer should experience complete holiness now. They teach that Jesus's death changed our nature, so we can live sinless lives now. This teaching is based on a "hidden knowledge" not found in the Bible. Kenneth Hagin claims in his book *How to Be Led by the Spirit of God* that those who hear this hidden knowledge can now become like Adam before the fall, sinless and in full relationship with God—because we have become little gods. This is not the picture of restoration and holiness that Ezekiel, or the Bible in general, referred to. This teaching takes the focus off God and Christ and makes us the focus of worship. The false teachers become so focused on the now, they rob the Christian of the true hope of the future.

How do we truly flourish?

Christians must live not by focusing on the present, as taught by false teachers, but on the ultimate fulfillment when God will assume his throne at the close of this age. In Revelation 21, John confirms that after the heavens and the earth pass away, God will be enthroned among his people on the new earth in the new Jerusalem, "the holy city ... having the glory of God" (Rev 21:10-11 ESV). At that time, we will be made new and dwell with God as holy people in the holy city, where God's glory will shine so brightly, there will be no need for a sun or moon (Rev 21:23). There we will worship him and flourish in full.

On the list, ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.

So how should we live today?

1. What was God's encouraging message to those living in despair? How does that message encourage you today?
2. Does God care if the people who worship him are living sinful lifestyles? How do we know if he cares?
3. If your church lived like holy people worshiping their holy God, how would that change your community?
4. How can you lead people to worship God appropriately?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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Tuell, Steven. *Ezekiel*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2009.

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30

We Will Walk with God Again

Main Idea: At the end of the age, in the new heaven and the new earth, everything will be completely redeemed and restored, and we will walk with God again as in the garden of Eden.

Scripture Passage: Revelation 21

Scripture Focus: Revelation 21:1-4; 9b-14; 22

OBJECTIVES



Head - I want participants to know we will walk with God again.



Heart - I want participants to long for the time when we walk with God again.



Hands - I want participants to live as God's image-bearers and his kingdom of priests who take his glory to the ends of the earth.

Review the thesis statement and the third main point.

Thesis: We flourish when we live in a right relationship with God in his creation.

Main Point 3: We flourish in creation when God dwells among us.

Review the arc of redemption and write this lesson's title in the Completion section of the arc. Be sure to write the title next to the number 30 on the arc with the temple icon.

DISCUSSION

Tell us about a time when you were anticipating something. How did knowing that moment was coming impact how you lived until then? [*Invite discussion.*]

From the very beginning, God wanted to walk with us. But we've seen throughout the Bible how our sin separated us from God, then through Jesus God made a way for us to dwell with him again, and he has promised he will come back. On that day, all the suffering that sin has caused will end. Everything will be made new, and we will walk with God again. So we wait with hope.

Let's take a closer look. [*Read the Scripture passage together.*]

The first verse tells us that John saw a new heaven and a new earth. By this point in John's story, the earth we live on now, with all its sin and corruption, was completely restored to its new state as in the garden of Eden.

The New Jerusalem that John saw coming down from heaven represented the church. We know this because in verses 2 and 9-10 John described the city as a bride. We see the same metaphor in Ephesians 5:22-33 when Paul presented the church as the bride of Christ. In verses 12-14 of today's passage, John said the city was built on the foundations of the apostles. Again, we find the same metaphor in Ephesians. Paul said the church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph 2:20-22 ESV).

In verse 3, a loud voice from heaven announced that the tabernacle of God was among men. This statement means that God will forever live among his people. You may recall that we read something similar in a previous lesson about John 1:14: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." We call this event in John the incarnation. God the Son became a man with a human body and lived among us. Interestingly, the original phrase "dwelt among us" can be translated "tabernacled among us." It reminds us that God's plans have not changed. From the beginning, he wanted to dwell among us. In Christ, he did dwell among us. And the day is coming when heaven will again meet earth forever. Just as God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, he will walk with us again.

But right now, life is full of sin, pain, illness, and suffering, isn't it? That was not God's design. What God designed was very good. But sin came. With the fall of humanity, corruption and death entered. For now, they remain. However, according to verse 4, a

day is coming when God will dwell among us again and life will be free of sin, pain, illness, and suffering. This will occur at the end of the age.

What do Neo-Pentecostal and prosperity teachers say?

The prosperity gospel states that life can already be free of pain, illness, and suffering. The Neo-Pentecostals claim that you can be free of all these horrible effects of the fall if you just have faith.

How do we truly flourish?

Not since the garden of Eden has anyone been able to avoid pain and suffering. Paul likely had eye problems (Gal 6:11; 2 Cor 12:9). Timothy had stomach problems (1 Tim 5:23). The church in Jerusalem needed other churches to financially provide for them (Rom 15:14-32). Even Christ himself, when he tabernacled among us as our Redeemer, faced the problems of this world. He was poor (Luke 2:24; Lev 14:22; Matt 17:27; Luke 9:57-58). He felt grief and sadness (John 11:35). He was betrayed and abandoned (John 6:66; Luke 22). And, of course, he suffered and died on the cross. Indeed, our salvation was secured not by escaping suffering and death, but by enduring and conquering suffering and death. Even in the end times, according to the book of Revelation, much suffering must be endured. Only at the end of the book do pain, death, sorrow, and crying cease.

But all that is wrong with the world will come to an end. It will end because Christ is victorious. He has conquered sin and death, and he will vanquish it. For now, we endure. We wait. And we know with full confidence that the suffering of this present age is not worthy to compare to the future glory that awaits us. We can persevere because God has redeemed us.

And that redemption is our great treasure. Some people often point to the beauty and the riches of heaven. They talk about streets of gold, crystal seas, and gates of pearl. But the great value of heaven is not those things. It is God. He is there. And one day, we will be there with him. But for now, we are here. Thankfully, he is with us, and because Christ became flesh and tabernacled among us, we will one day dwell with him forever. In that day, we will no longer need a temple. We will experience heaven on earth and walk with God again.

***On the list,** ask participants to write in the columns what they learned from this lesson that the prosperity gospel teachers say and the Bible says. Ask them to add a short response they could give to a prosperity teacher who makes this false claim.*

So how should we live today?

1. What does the New Jerusalem represent? What in its description makes you think that it is so?
2. What does it mean that the tabernacle of God is among men? Whom or what does the tabernacle represent in today's text?
3. If pain and suffering do not end until Jesus returns, what does that tell us about the message of Neo-Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel preachers? How would you respond to a prosperity gospel preacher who tells you that suffering and illness do not belong in the life of a believer?
4. At the beginning of today's text, John said he saw a new heaven and a new earth. What does that tell us about redemption? Did Jesus merely save our souls, or did he accomplish much more? How does that make you feel about this world we live in and your role in it?
5. What is the most important point you've learned about flourishing or true prosperity from this Bible study series, and how will you live differently because of it?

*Ask a participant to lead the group to **review** the thesis, the third main point, the arc of redemption, and the list.*

LEARN MORE

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APPENDIX 1

The Redemptive Arc

The Redemptive Arc



Redemption

Fall

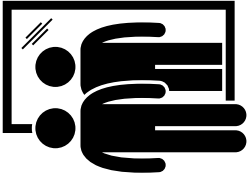
Creation

Completion



APPENDIX 2

The Redemptive Arc (Key)



The Redemptive Arc

The Image of God



- 4 All power and authority belong to Christ
- 5 Jesus is the image of our reconciling God
- 6 We are being transformed into the image of Christ

Redemption



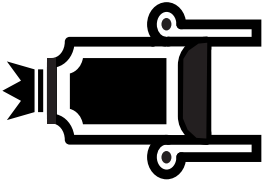
Creation

- 1 We flourish when we care for creation
- 2 We flourish when we work

Fall 3 God wants a relationship with us

Completion

- 7 & 8 We will bear the image of Christ fully when we are resurrected
- 9 We must live in light of who we will be
- 10 We can hope even as we suffer
- 11 We are citizens of heaven eagerly awaiting our savior's return



The Redemptive Arc

The Kingdom of God



- 14 We must be born again
- 15 Kingdom citizens repent
- 16 Kingdom citizens have been rescued
- 17 We are a kingdom of priests
- 18 We are the caretakers of God's kingdom

Redemption



Creation

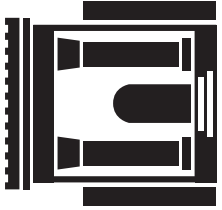
- 12 God created us to be vice-regents in his kingdom

Fall

- 13 We await the restoration of the world

Completion

- 19 Healing and provision are compassionate signs of God's kingdom
- 20 At Christ's return, demonic powers will be destroyed
- 21 Christ's kingdom will never end



The Redemptive Arc

The Temple of God



- 25 God's presence requires holiness
- 26 God will dwell with us again
- 27 Jesus is the temple among us
- 28 God's Spirit dwells in us

Redemption



Creation

- 22 God's presence is what we need

Fall

- 23 Our sin broke our relationship with God
- 24 The proud cannot dwell with God

Completion

- 29 God's glory will return to us
- 30 We will walk with God again

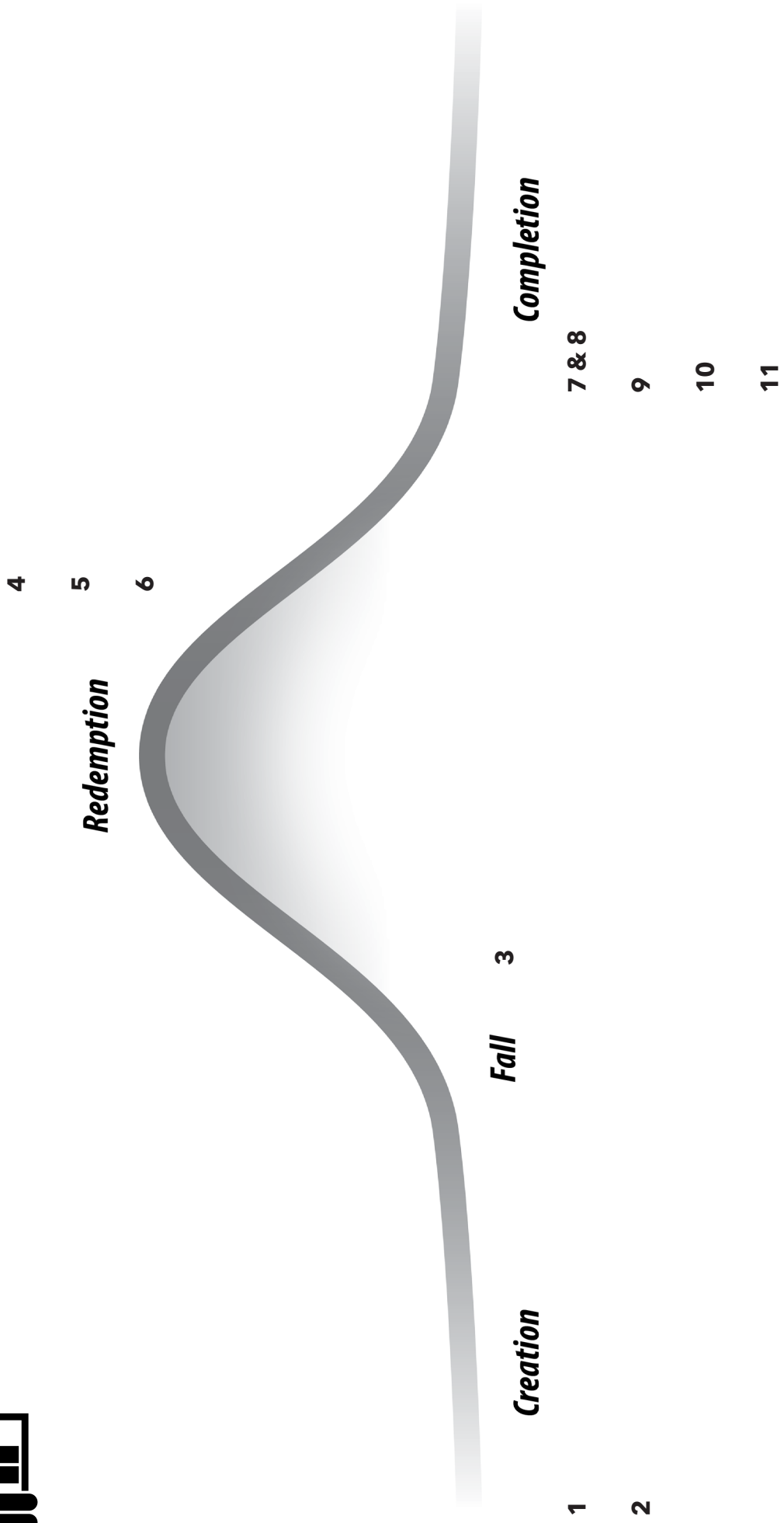
APPENDIX 3

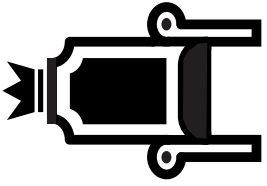
The Redemptive Arc (Blank)



The Redemptive Arc

The Image of God





The Redemptive Arc

The Kingdom of God



14

15

16

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18

Redemption

Fall 13

Creation

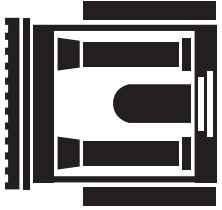
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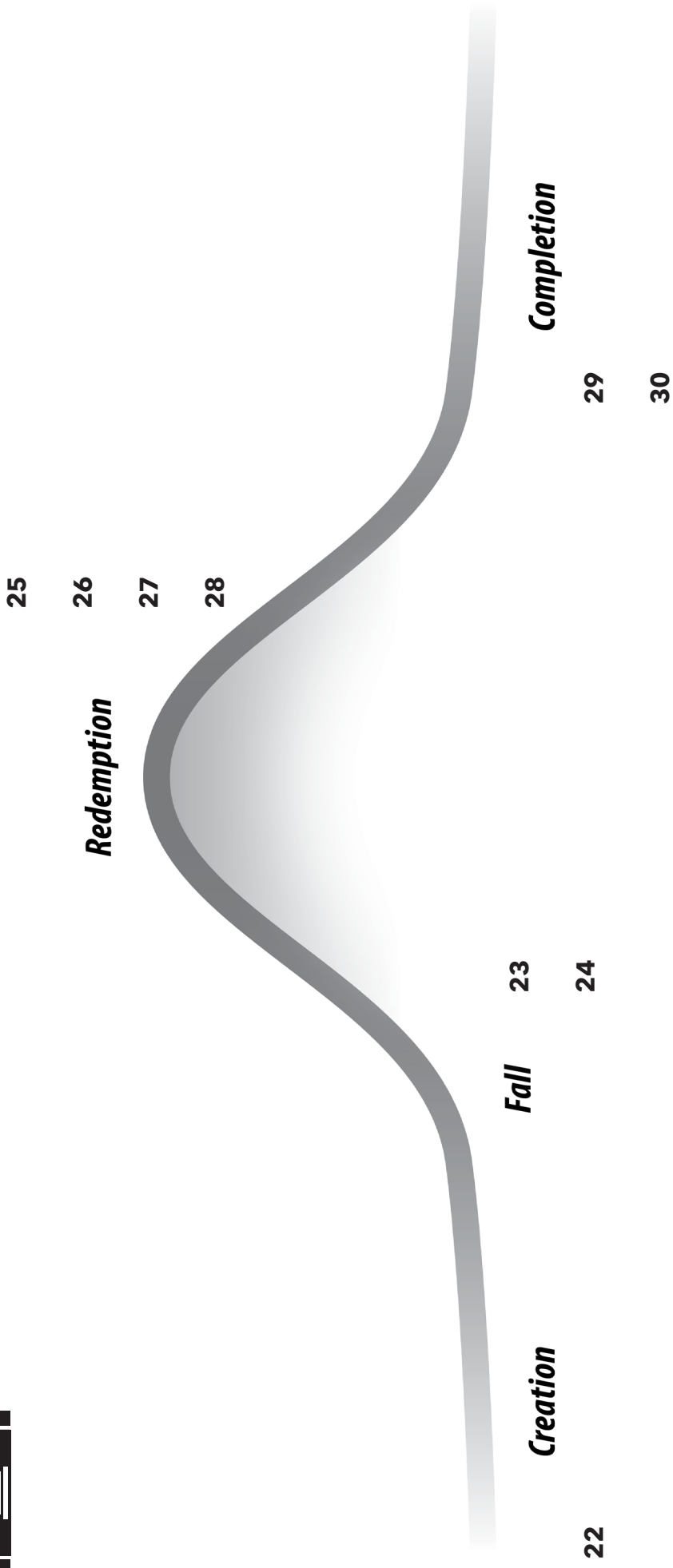
20

21



The Redemptive Arc

The Temple of God



APPENDIX 4

What Can We Say? (Examples)

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>1 We can become like gods and command spiritual forces to give us what we want.</p>	<p>God created us in his image. He intends for us, as his image bearers, to be the caretakers of his creation.</p>	<p>God intends for us to be stewards or caretakers of his creation to bring the earth to its full potential.</p>
<p>2 We can abandon our work and just receive God's blessings, like health and wealth.</p>	<p>At creation and before the fall, God told Adam and Eve to work by cultivating the garden and tending to it.</p>	<p>God designed us from the very beginning to work, so work is good. It leads to flourishing and blessing.</p>
<p>3 We don't need to make people feel bad about their sin. We should encourage them and let them know God loves them and wants to bless them.</p>	<p>God created us to be in a relationship with him. Sadly, our sin separates us from God. But God wants a relationship with us so much that he sent his Son, who willingly died to pay for our sins so that our relationship with God could be restored.</p>	<p>Jesus offers us so much more than material blessings. He paid the price for our sins and made a way for our relationship with God to be restored, if only we will put our faith in him alone.</p>
<p>4 We have authority over evil spirits simply by invoking Christ's name.</p>	<p>God gave Jesus authority over all other powers. His authority extends to us in that what Jesus did for us cannot be overruled by any other spiritual power.</p>	<p>We benefit from the fact that Jesus has power and authority over all other powers and authorities. Nothing can overrule Jesus's power and authority to conquer our sin and death.</p>
<p>5 Let's not talk about how Jesus has reconciled us to God. Let's just get excited about our access to spiritual power.</p>	<p>Through his death and resurrection, Jesus showed the ultimate power by reconciling us to God and restoring what was broken in us in the fall. As the very image of God, Jesus shows us that God is a powerful reconciler.</p>	<p>Jesus showed true spiritual power when he reconciled me to God through his death and resurrection. And that power is evident in me as I become more like Jesus. Would you like to have that kind of power working in you?</p>
<p>6 You are a child of the King, so you are successful. Your success is your glory.</p>	<p>Our sin is a veil that prevents us from seeing God's glory. But when we put our faith in Jesus, he removes that veil, and the more we see God's glory, the more his Spirit transforms us to become like him.</p>	<p>Though my vision was veiled by sin, Christ himself removed the veil so I could see God's glory. And now, as I look at God in his glory, his Spirit transforms me to be more like him.</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>7 We can live our best life now. Wealth, health, and prosperity are ours if we just claim them in faith.</p>	<p>Because Christ was resurrected, we will be resurrected too. Then we will be completely free from the effects of sin and death.</p>	<p>I'm grateful for the blessings God gives me now, but my best life will be in the afterlife when God raises me from the dead. Would you also like to have hope beyond this life?</p>
<p>8 Jesus has freed us from the curse. If you are not healed, it's because you don't have enough faith.</p>	<p>We have earthly bodies that are dying under the curse, but we are being conformed to the image of Christ until he returns. Then we will have resurrected heavenly bodies like his.</p>	<p>I believe I am made of dust that was cursed, so I can't expect to be perfect in this life, but Christ is increasingly making me more like him. And when he returns, I will be completely restored and given a resurrected body like his.</p>
<p>9 God has given us power and authority over spiritual beings. They must do what we say.</p>	<p>When God restores his image in humans at the end of the age, one of our responsibilities will be to rule over creation and judge angels.</p>	<p>Someday we will judge the angels when God renews the heavens and the earth and completely restores his image in us, but not today. For now, we need to be faithful in the earthly responsibilities he gives us.</p>
<p>10 Jesus has won the victory! We don't need to suffer. We just need to claim the healing and riches that are ours.</p>	<p>We look forward to the day when there will be no suffering, pain, and death. Christ has won that victory for us even though we don't see it yet. There will be a time when there will be a new heaven and new earth without suffering and death.</p>	<p>Yes, Jesus has won the victory, but we will see his complete victory when he returns and heaven and earth are renewed. On that day, our struggles with sin and suffering will be over.</p>
<p>11 You can have it all! Just claim what is yours.</p>	<p>Those who glory in earthly things will end in destruction. We do not set our minds on earthly things, because we are citizens of heaven who eagerly await the return of our Savior. When he comes, he will transform our bodies to be like his glorious body.</p>	<p>This world is not my home. As a citizen of heaven, I have greater goals and desires than what this world can offer me. I'm eagerly waiting for Christ to return to restore me and all of creation.</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>12 My spiritual authority as a man of God is unchallenged. My word is not questioned. God has given me Spirit power, and I have the authority to perform miracles. I can heal people and cast out demons.</p>	<p>God has given all human beings authority over his creation, but we demonstrate this authority as God's caretakers for creation.</p>	<p>I believe that because God gave humanity authority over creation from the very beginning, we all have that authority. But God wants us to use it as his stewards, to serve his purposes. And sometimes those purposes don't look like excellent health, abundance of wealth, or instant victory in all circumstances.</p>
<p>13 Difficulties, poor health, and lack of resources indicate a lack of faith. We need not suffer. God has already given us the victory!</p>	<p>Human beings still exercise authority over the creation. But all creation, including our human existence, is under the curse of sin. Suffering, illness, and sinfulness is a part of this world until Jesus returns.</p>	<p>Because creation is under the curse of sin, I can expect difficulties until Jesus returns. I will face problems. Sinful people will cause me harm. And I will not be free from pain. But God's mercy will sustain me until Jesus comes again.</p>
<p>14 Live your best life! God wants to make you prosperous and healthy. He wants to give you victory.</p>	<p>We cannot be part of God's kingdom unless we are "born again." To be born again means to experience a complete spiritual renewal. We can receive this renewal through repentance and faith in Jesus. This is the gospel message, the message of good news.</p>	<p>I was dead in my sin, but Jesus has given me a new life. When I turned away from my sin and put my faith in Jesus, he welcomed me into his kingdom. Someday, when Jesus returns, I will live my best life in his fully restored kingdom.</p>
<p>15 Pray this prayer. Just repeat after me. Now give your tithes and serve the church so God will bless you with health and wealth.</p>	<p>Jesus says to repent because his kingdom is near. He has the authority to forgive us and welcome us into his kingdom. But in his kingdom, blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who suffer for his name's sake.</p>	<p>I turn away from my sin and turn to Jesus, who has the authority to forgive me. I want to live as a citizen of the kingdom he described in the Gospels, so I no longer live for my own desires. Would you like to live as a citizen of his kingdom with me?</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>16 You are suffering because you do not believe in your spiritual power. I am a man of God. I can deliver you from darkness. I can deliver you from your poverty, sickness, and suffering.</p>	<p>When Christ gave his life for us, he paid the price to redeem us, to rescue and deliver us from sin and the kingdom of darkness. Through his redemption, we can enter the kingdom of God.</p>	<p>I am grateful that God has rescued me from the kingdom of darkness. Because he has saved me from eternal suffering, even in my current suffering I can live as a citizen of his kingdom.</p>
<p>17 Because we're in God's kingdom, we don't suffer from poverty or sickness. We are served like kings and queens who rule the earth.</p>	<p>God called Israel a "kingdom of priests" who were to represent his kingdom to all people. Jesus gave us a model for this role when he came as the Servant King.</p>	<p>When I look at the model of God's kingdom that Jesus gave us, I see a king who served. I believe God also wants me to represent his kingdom by serving.</p>
<p>18 We have power over everything—right here, right now.</p>	<p>God gave Adam authority over all creation. Sin diminished that authority, even though it wasn't completely destroyed. Christ, as a sinless man, has restored our status, and when he returns, we will have full dominion over creation again.</p>	<p>I regret that sometimes I let created things dominate me. I believe God has given me authority as a caretaker of his kingdom according to his will, but I do not yet have complete authority. So I wait eagerly for Christ's return.</p>
<p>19 If you will give me money, God will give it back to you a hundredfold. Don't be stingy when you give me your tithes and offerings, or God will be stingy with you.</p>	<p>Jesus worked miracles such as multiplying fish and loaves because he had compassion on people—compassion they didn't have to earn. His miracles also demonstrated that in his kingdom, the curse God pronounced on creation will be reversed and all needs will be met. In the new kingdom, we will see abundance, but not until after Jesus returns.</p>	<p>When Jesus meets my needs, he meets them because he has compassion on me. I don't have to earn or pay for his miracles. I believe that when Jesus returns, in his kingdom all needs will be met. I want to be part of a church that demonstrates God's kingdom by helping to meet people's needs now.</p>
<p>20 Our authority over all things on earth—disease, bad circumstances, wealth—is absolute. We can command blessings through Christ's authority.</p>	<p>Jesus Christ reigns over God's kingdom on earth from his throne in heaven. But his reign is still not felt everywhere nor completely. Christ will reign until he has defeated all of his enemies absolutely. The last enemy is death.</p>	<p>I can see that, for now, Jesus's reign over his kingdom on earth is not felt everywhere nor completely, and neither is our authority. So I'm eagerly waiting for Christ's return, when his reign will extend to all creation. His authority over all his enemies will be fulfilled at the end of the age.</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>21 God wants you to prosper. You should be healthy and wealthy. If you're suffering right now, it's because you either lack faith or you are living in sin.</p>	<p>Sometimes God's people will suffer for his glory like Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did. Obedience does not necessarily rescue anyone from suffering. It can, in fact, lead to suffering. But one day the kingdom of evil will be conquered, and Christ will reign eternally.</p>	<p>I am not here to build my own kingdom. I believe that God allows us to suffer. And he tells us that in the end times, that suffering will be even worse. But someday, he will end all suffering, and Christ will reign forever over all other kingdoms. I am waiting for that day and will persevere until it comes.</p>
<p>22 If you have God in your life, you will prosper. It is even your responsibility to prosper. Seek prosperity.</p>	<p>God's presence is our ultimate need. He wants us to enjoy his presence, where we can have a relationship with him and flourish in his provision. But his presence also gives us the responsibility to live like his holy people.</p>	<p>God is everything I need. I'm humbled that he wants me to be in his presence. I'm grateful for all he has given me. I want to worship him because of who he is.</p>
<p>23 You lack spiritual power and blessings because you lack faith. You can claim victory over your health, your finances, and in your circumstances through Holy Spirit power.</p>	<p>Our sin caused a fatal spiritual break in our relationship with God. This separation was evident when God removed Adam and Eve from the garden. Nothing we can do on our own can repair the spiritual break in our relationship with God. We are utterly lost unless God works in our hearts and lives through the gospel.</p>	<p>Sin broke our relationship with God and diminished our spiritual power and blessings. But Christ has paid the price to restore our relationship with God, and I await the day when he will return and everything will be restored as in the garden of Eden.</p>
<p>24 I am a man of God who has acquired all this wealth.</p>	<p>From the beginning, God created a place where we could dwell with him. But our prideful thinking that we could be gods like him caused us to be banished from his presence to die as mere mortals.</p>	<p>I don't want to claim that I've acquired anything on my own. I would have nothing without God's grace.</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>25 I live right so that God gives me the power to get rich. If you live right, God will make you rich too.</p>	<p>God wanted to dwell with his people, but he required them to live according to his ways for him to dwell with them. Of course, they could not, and we cannot. So Jesus has become the sacrifice, making us holy and allowing us to dwell with God in him. God himself is our reward.</p>	<p>God himself is my prize. I am grateful that Jesus has paid the price for me to be right with God, because I could never live right in my own power.</p>
<p>26 Just speak your words of faith. "I command you, Holy Spirit, to" God will do what you say in faith.</p>	<p>Because God's people continually sinned, God left the temple, where he met with them. The people had no control over God or his presence. But God graciously promised the return of his presence, and Jesus has fulfilled that promise. Jesus also sent us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Having the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit within us is much better than meeting God in the temple. In fact, we have become the temple. But we still cannot control God.</p>	<p>I cannot control God. I believe God's Spirit lives within me, but he does not obey me.</p>
<p>27 Jesus is not fully God and fully man. He is not the Messiah.</p>	<p>When Jesus took upon himself human flesh, he "tabernacled" among us as fully God and fully man. He became the place at which heaven touches earth. John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend on Jesus at his baptism in much the same way that the Spirit descended on the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple. As the "tabernacle," Jesus became the means by which God and human beings may have a relationship once again through the gospel. He was the promised Messiah God's people had been waiting for.</p>	<p>The Bible says Jesus was God in the flesh. He was the Son whom God had promised to send to restore our relationship with him. When the Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, God showed us that Jesus was the tabernacle where heaven met earth. Because of Jesus, I can meet with God.</p>

What can we say?



Prosperity Teachers Say	The Bible Says	We Can Say
<p>28 You need the Holy Spirit so you can have victory! He will give you victory over your finances, your health, and whatever is going on in your life. If you have an enemy, blast him with the Holy Spirit!</p>	<p>After Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to the church. The Spirit filled the believers in Jerusalem similar to the way he filled the tabernacle and the temple. The church, united to Christ through the Spirit, is now the temple of God—the place where heaven meets earth. God gave us the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and give us the power to walk in his ways, taking his glory all over the world.</p>	<p>The Holy Spirit is so much more powerful in me. He transforms my heart and gives me the power to live as God wants me to live. Through me, he spreads God's glory throughout the world, even among my enemies. Would you like for him to transform your heart too?</p>
<p>29 I have received hidden knowledge from God. I am a little god. I was born again and became a divine being.</p>	<p>God gave Ezekiel a vision of a new temple at a future time. This new temple represented our renewed, restored relationship with God that we will experience in the future. At the end of this age, heaven and earth will meet and God will reunite with human beings once again.</p>	<p>God gave visions to people like Ezekiel and John to reveal his plan of redemption. He showed them that his glory will return to us when everything is made new, including us. Someday God will dwell with us again, and we will be his holy people who worship him.</p>
<p>30 If you are a child of God, you should not suffer. There is no suffering for those who have faith in God.</p>	<p>For now, we will suffer. We experience God's grace and salvation today, but we will not see it in its fullness until the end of the age. After Jesus returns, the new heaven and the new earth will meet, and all will be restored. Then we will dwell with God forever.</p>	<p>I long for the day when Christ's victory over sin, death, and evil is complete. When that day comes, all of creation will be completely renewed. We will no longer suffer, for we will dwell with God forever.</p>

APPENDIX 5

What Can We Say? (Blank)



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is a task force of the Africa Baptist Theological Education Network concerned with protecting the integrity of the gospel. We undertake publications and multimedia materials to equip Christians with biblical truth and to promote the evangelical faith.

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