



Lesson 23

Long Way From Home

Teacher's Notes:

When Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom, God's people are taken away into exile, and we hear no more of the story of those ten tribes. We get no glimpse into the life of those in exile until Babylon conquers Assyria then turns its forces to attack Jerusalem. The best and brightest were taken into exile. This would have included military, political, and economic leaders, and their promising young sons and daughters. Many of the eldest were killed if they were influential, died along the journey to Babylon, or were left behind to fend for themselves.

After the fall of Jerusalem, among the exiles was the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel had been warning for years about the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. Ezekiel's early message had been one of doom and gloom, with God's wrath and judgment and the destruction of God's holy city at the center of his message. However, during the exile in Babylon when God's people start to lose heart and feel alone in the strange land, Ezekiel's message changes to one of hope and restoration. Through Ezekiel, God promises to restore Israel as a nation.

The book of Ezekiel is not the only source available for exploring the exile experience. Psalm 137 shares the feelings and experience of God's people living in a strange land. This psalm shows the connection between God, the land, the temple, and the people—as well as the emotional distress of the exiles. You can hear their lament and their hatred towards those who have taken them so far from home. The last line of the Psalm is troubling, expressing a desire for revenge, even upon the children of Babylon.

How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land? Some considerations:

- The temple had been the center of worship - what now?
- They don't worship our God. They serve foods we are not supposed to eat
- Many of our friends and family weren't taken in exile; are they okay?
- We have lost so many familiar things that we had taken for granted.
- What do we need in order to be happy again?
- How do you survive as an outsider who doesn't even know the customs?
- How strange is it to feel alone even in the middle of so many people?
- What makes home feel like "home"?

Scripture: Psalm 137
Ezekiel 37:1-15

Supplies: •Note cards and pens
•Article: Fahid's story (Refugee story, from resources)

Preparation: Stuff to do

Activity	Instructions	Time
Emergency!	Ask each member of the class to list things they would take from their home if there was an emergency and they only had time to grab 10 things. Give each person a note card to write their list.	15 min.



Have each person cut their list from 10 to 5 and then invite them to share their lists. Have them remove 3 more items from the list (leaving only 2) and share again.

Move!

Tell class members to imagine that they are moving and may never be back to the state they live in. Ask them to make a list of 10 things they would want to take a picture of. They can be things at home or the surrounding area.

Have each person cut their list from 10 to 5 and then invite them to share their lists. Have them remove 3 more items from the list (leaving only 2) and share again.

Ask:

- How many of the things on either list are religious in nature?
- If you moved, would you worry about feeling far from God?
- What would you miss most about your faith life if you moved?
- How would your relationship with God change?

Bible Study

Explain:

10 min.

The scripture we are about to read takes place after Babylon has conquered Assyria and attacked Jerusalem. They have taken their strongest leaders and community members into exile. As you listen, remember that they are far from home and don't know when or if they will ever return home. Note that Zion is the name of a mountain near Jerusalem and the name was often used to refer to the whole region. It was Jerusalem that had been the center of cultural life and their religion. The temple was in Jerusalem and they thought, in some way, that God was present in the temple in a way unlike any other place.

Read Psalm 137

Ask:

- What questions do you have about this reading?
(Use teacher's notes to answer as you are comfortable.)
- What would you like to ask one of the exiles singing this Psalm?
- What would you like to say to one of the exiles singing this Psalm?
- When have you ever left a place that was very important to you?
- How does it feel to leave a special place?
- Why do people leave places they call "home" ?
(What about in other countries? Refugees?)
- What would it take to make you as angry as the Psalmist?
- What do you think God might want the exiles to know?



Respond! Explain to the class that they will be writing a message *15 min.*
As though they are a prophet representing God’s word to the exiles. Tell the class that they have 10 minutes to construct a message that God might want the exiles to know. You may want to split the class into small groups for this project if you have a large class. After 10 minutes, invite them to share their work.

Ask:

- How did you start this project? Did you pray?
- Would you feel comfortable telling anyone it is a message from God?

Bible Study **Explain:** *13 min.*
Our next text is a response from the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel was one of the exiles, known for strange images in his messages that sometimes read like science fiction. In his earliest prophecies, Ezekiel brought warnings about the fall of Jerusalem and judgment from God.

Read Ezekiel 37:1-15

Ask:

- What might God have been trying to tell Ezekiel?
- What might God have been trying to tell the exiles?

Fahid’s Story **Read** the story of Farid, a modern-day refugee, in resources
Ask:

- How are modern-day refugees like the exiles?
- How are modern-day refugees different than the exiles?
- What would you like to say to Farid?
- What do you think God might say to Farid?

Prayer Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. *2 min.*
Ask each person to lift up a prayer of hope for someone else who feels lost or alone.

BBC On-line Thursday, 18 October, 2001, 18:18 GMT 19:18 UK

A refugee's story

Farid Ahmad, a 16-year-old pupil at Villiers High School in Southall, west London describes his life in Afghanistan, his journey to Britain and how he feels today

“My name’s Farid Ahmad. I am from Afghanistan. It’s a very beautiful country in the heart of Asia. It has very nice, peaceful, hospitable, brave, innocent, war-threatened and poor people.

“I am from Ningarhar, the border province of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We were living a peaceful life. Everyone was happy, everything was OK. Suddenly a plan was made by the Russians and they invaded our homeland.

“A war started, a holy war against the Russians. My father started fighting for his country as a pure Afghan.

“They fought with the Russians for more than 10 years and won. When the Russians left our country our leaders started fighting with each other for some purposes and some causes which had bad effects.

“I was a very small boy during this time. I was a kid who didn’t know anything. We lost our father. My mother searched for my father. She asked many people, she had many problems, everything was destroyed, our lives were in danger, our future was destroyed because we lost our father.

“He was missing for a long time. Then some people told my mother that my father had been killed. This was the worst day in our family life.

“Then some people told us our father was alive. We waited for him but never heard anything from him anymore. My mother confirmed that our father had died. That was the darkest period in our history. We didn’t have anyone to look after us.

“We were Muslims but not restricted Muslims, our family were social people. My parents wanted to give us a modern life and a modern future. They wanted us to study not only Islam but modern studies and much more.

“My brothers and sisters were studying but we still had feelings about our father because we never saw his live body or dead body.

“Then the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, they stopped women from working, studying and having a normal life.

“Our problems became more and more. We didn’t have anyone to give us something to make a living although we were from the Khan family.

“Khan in Afghanistan means landlords and people with much power, money and strength.

“At this time, I, my brothers and sisters were studying at school. We were studying Eng-



lish language courses and computer courses.

“My elder brother Nisar Ahmad left our beloved country and came to the UK because he didn’t want to fight against our own Afghan brothers. My mother didn’t want him to go on fighting.

“When I was 15, I was old enough to look after my family. But my mother was afraid and made arrangements for me to leave and join my brother.

“I remember the day when I left my family. I looked at my brothers and sisters and they could all see me crying because we didn’t know when we would see each other again.

“I love my family, I love my country and my people with whom I could never fight. It’s impossible to fire even one bullet towards my Afghan brothers even if they’re wrong. That’s why my mother wanted me to leave Afghanistan.

“On my way to the UK I faced hundreds of problems. I walked for several hours in deserts, mountain, in dark nights, in forests, rain, cold weather and hunger.

“I spent many nights underground without any bed or blanket with very little food to survive on. I feared and worried for my life. But I was not upset for myself because I am a man and a man never gives up. I think I was on my way for more than two months.

“Now on TV I am watching my country and my people being attacked by the United States. My people are again facing a very big problem.

“Now I do not know the whereabouts of my family and I miss them very much.

“Some people say they’re in Pakistan, others say they’re in Iran or Afghanistan. I am here in the UK. I feel safe but I am not happy. I miss my brothers and sisters and my mother very much.

“I hate terrorism, killing of innocent people and shooting of human beings. I’ll never do anything wrong according to humanitarian law.

“I want the world to hear my story because I want to tell them that Afghanistan is a very nice country with nice people and nice culture.

“Our people do not want to fight, they do not want to kill each other but I don’t know what the causes are of the fighting.

“I don’t know how one Afghan can kill another Afghan. Our religion doesn’t tell us to kill any innocent human beings, it teaches us peace, love, freedom, justice and human rights.

“People in Afghanistan are very poor, they do not have shelter. Sometimes they only eat once a day or once every two days.

“I pray to my God to help Afghanistan, they are fed up of fighting, of all the problems and being refugees.”

**Lesson 24****Holy, Holy, Holy****Teacher’s Notes:**

Those who were not taken into exile faced a great deal of change. Although they had the comfort of home, their community leaders and many of their youth were missing. Those left behind had to deal with the loss of friends and family as well as the holes left in community structure. Imagine the struggle of people, not used to leadership, trying to rediscover a “normal” routine. School, banking, and other structures would have taken a big hit by those taken into exile. On top of these changes in community, they were now under rule of a foreign government, while vulnerable to outside attack as well.

The biggest change may not have been what was taken away, but what was destroyed. The loss of the temple cannot be overstated. Those in exile had to find new ways to worship far away from the temple. Those who remained had to find an expression for their faith while the temple lay in a ruin that they could see every day. If God “lived” in the temple, where was God now? Had God gone away? Such questions force reflection on the true nature of God and the definition of holiness. Was the rubble that had once been the temple still a “holy” place? Was holiness to be found in the land, the building, or the people?

Things changed for those who stayed behind. Jeremiah was a prophet who had warned the leadership of Judah about the rise of Babylon. People did not want to hear Jeremiah but could not seem to escape his message. Jeremiah was jailed, put on house arrest, threatened, rescued, summoned, and ignored. His personal safety swayed with the politics and fears of the royal court. Unlike other prophets, Jeremiah is right in the middle of everything and has access to the highest places of power. Habakkuk is a much lesser known prophet but spoke at a similar time in history. Habakkuk echoes the plea of God’s people, seeking to understand the events around them. Habakkuk calls out to God with the cries and prayers of the people.

Scriptures: Jeremiah 1: 1-8
2 Chronicles 36: 11-21
Habakkuk 2: 18 – 19
Jeremiah 31:31-34

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Some personal objects and random objects (for, *Can things be holy?*)

Preparation: Think about the things that are “holy” in your life.

Activity	Instructions	Time
Holy	Invite the class to think about “holy” places.	30 min.
Ground	Have them list the three most “holy” places they have ever seen or visited. Invite them to share their lists.	



Ask:

- What makes these places special to you?
- What makes these places holy?
- How do you define holy?
- What are some other holy places in other cultures?
- How important are holy places? Why?
- How does a place become holy?
- Can a place stop being holy? If so, how?

Read 2 Chronicles 36: 11-21

Ask:

- How would it affect your faith if our church building was destroyed by winds or a fire?
- What about the loss might be the hardest to get over?
- What about the loss would make it easier to face?
- How do you think our church would worship without our sanctuary?
- How do you think our church members would stay connected without our building?
- If you were re-building our church, what would you change?
- Can you think of big changes that have been made in our church building over the years?
- Do you remember how generations before you dealt with change in the building?
- Are there other special places in your life that have changed? (church camp, school, home, park, ball field, etc.)
- How did physical changes affect your experience of that place?

Interviews:

Group class members into pairs and send them out to find older members of the church to interview with the previous questions. Bring back notes to share with the class. They could even invite an older member of the church to come back to class with them. Let each pair share what they heard from another generation.

As before, remind class members to be respectful, to not force people into talking if it seems they would prefer not to, and to generously thank them when finished.

Ask:

- Where do you think God really lives?
- What else can be holy? (writings, songs, etc.)
- In what way are people holy?
- In what way may some people be more holy than others?

**Holy
People**

Read Jeremiah 1: 1 – 8

10 min.

Ask:

- What does this text suggest about the holiness of people?

Read Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Ask:

- What does this text suggest about the holiness of people?
- How do you see yourself as a holy person?
- Who are the most holy people you know?
- Are they different from you? If so, how?
- Are there people you think you may be more holy than?
- If all people were treated as holy, how would it change the way you treat them?

Holy Stuff

Lay out a few small personal objects and some random things that have no meaning to them. *10 min.*

Ask:

- What else can be holy? (already asked this earlier)
- Which of these things do you think is holy?

Explain:

Tell about some of the objects you have shared.
Share why they are important or represent something holy to you.
Invite the group to share or tell about some of their own items.
(Many may have them in pockets or purses.)

Ask:

- What makes these items special to you?
- Are they holy?

Holy Bible

Place a Bible in front of the class. *8 min.*

Ask:

- What makes this holy?
- If we spilled water on the pages, would it still be holy?
- If there was a fire and it burned, would it still be holy?
- Many times in history, including during the Holocaust, Jewish Bibles (the Tanakh) have been taken from Jewish people and burned in bonfires, sometimes by Christians, and sometimes with other persecutions and killings of Israelite (Jewish) people. *(The Tanakh is the same Hebrew Bible as the Christian Old Testament, although after the first seven books, the scriptures differ in the way they are arranged and categorized.)* Do you think the scriptures that were burned were holy?
- If a Bible remains un-opened and un-read, would it be holy?
- If this Bible were old and pages falling out, do you think it would it be more or less holy? Why ?
- Are there any writings that are not in the Bible but are holy?
- Do you think there are different levels of holiness?

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. *2 min.*
Ask each person to give thanks for something holy to them.
The last person can close the prayer by saying, “Amen.”



Lesson 25

Call for a Messiah

Teacher's Notes:

One of the most influential messages of the prophets was the promise of a Messiah who would come to rescue God's people. The word messiah is translated as "anointed one," or anointed leader, with the term considered applicable to other Jewish leaders who came to lead throughout Jewish history.

The New Testament references many texts of the Hebrew Bible in narratives about Jesus. Although Jesus does "fulfill" many of these prophecies, it is important to remember that some prophecies were "fulfilled" in their own day. For example, Isaiah spoke of one who was to come and set the people free; he later named Cyrus of the Persians (see lesson 26) as the "messiah," who set the people free from Babylonian captivity.

The promise of a messiah continues to be a major theme in Judaism. By the time of Jesus, a majority of Jewish people had been dispersed to live in areas far from Jerusalem. With no modern news services, most probably heard little or nothing about the Jewish teacher named Jesus during his short ministry. Some Jewish people who did hear about Jesus did not believe that he could be the promised Messiah, because their understanding was that the Messiah was to come bringing a reign of peace, order, justice, and love for all—and they didn't see this happening, but often the opposite. Jewish people who did not know about, or did not believe Jesus of Nazareth was the prophesied Messiah, became ammunition for anti-Jewish (against Judaism) and anti-Semitic (against the Jewish race) condemnation and persecution, and some Christian leaders to teach that God's promise to be faithful to Israel had become null and void.

In the years to come, Christians didn't always represent Jesus Christ (Christ is the Greek word for 'Messiah' as being concerned with love, justice, and mercy to neighbors, much less to God's chosen people of Israel. Throughout history countless Christians killed, persecuted, and treated unjustly Jewish people for being "Christ killers." Christians led or approved as Jewish people were given choices of exile or death, baptism or death. The same was true as they were publically ridiculed, made to live in set-apart ghettos, and stripped of the rights of other citizens. As Jewish people were being persecuted by Christians and as well as those of other faiths, they continued to draw strength from the stories that had been passed down through the generations about the exile, Babylonian captivity, and later atrocities (for instance, in the *Apocrypha*, see 2 Maccabees, chapter 7). Such stories of faithful devotion and strength inspired generations of Jewish people to remain strong and devoted in their faithfulness to God and God's teachings.

It is important to read prophetic texts in their own context without projecting our Christian beliefs onto the events. That does not mean we cannot see Jesus reflected in those events. That is a fair reading of scripture, but the original writers lived in a specific context that should not be forgotten. Nor should God's covenant and faithfulness to Israel be treated as promises that God went back upon. God remains faithful to all generations of God's children.

Scriptures: Isaiah 11: 1 – 9
 Zechariah 9: 9-10
 Micah 5: 2-4
 Isaiah 52: 13 – 15

Isaiah 44: 21 – 28 – Cyrus named
 Isaiah 45: 1 – 4 – Cyrus description



Supplies: Bibles

Preparation: Look over this lesson carefully and make sure you are prepared to answer any of your own questions.

Activity	Instructions	Time
Waiting Game	Have two volunteers line up for a race. You can set any distance. It doesn't matter. Say, "Ready, set..." But don't say, "Go!" Keep the two racers waiting. Start over with "Ready, set..." But don't say "Go." Just keep them waiting. Have the volunteers sit down (no, there is no race).	10 min.

Ask:

- How did it feel to keep waiting?
- How good are you at waiting on things?
- What are the hardest things for you to wait for?
- Can you share a memory where you were bad at waiting?
- What makes waiting hard?
- What makes waiting easier?

Waiting Time Explain that another word for waiting is *anticipation*. In the church we have two special times of year when we talk about anticipation. See if the class can name both (Advent and Lent). 10 min.

Ask:

- What is Advent? (preparation for Christmas)
- How long is Advent? (4 weeks before Christmas)
- What traditions does the church have around Advent?
(purple, wreath, music, Hanging of the Greens, etc. ?)
- What is Advent getting us ready for?
- What things do you, personally, look forward to in Advent?

Explain:

Christmas is a celebration of Jesus birth, but has also been a time when the Church looks forward to a time when the Messiah will come into the world again (the Jewish people see that this will be the first time the Messiah will come; Christians believe that this will be the Messiah's second time to come).

Ask:

- What is Lent? (Preparation for Easter)
- How long is Lent? (60 days running from Ash Wednesday to Easter)
- What traditions does the church have around Lent?
(purple, special worship services, Baptism preparation, etc. ?)
- What is Lent getting us ready for?
- What things do you, personally, look forward to during this time?

Explain: Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Part of Easter is the reminder that Jesus died as a sacrifice for our sins and Easter reminds us that we are forgiven and have



new life. We celebrate the promise of this new, eternal life and look forward to a day when we will all live eternally with God.

- Waiting For What?** **Ask:** *7 min.*
- Which do you look forward to or celebrate the most?
Jesus' birth or Jesus' coming again?
New life in God's forgiveness or eternal life?
 - How do you think age might change your answers?
 - How do you think living in poverty might change your answers?
 - How do you think living in a war zone might change your answers?
 - What other factors could change your answers?
- Hope** Split the class up into pairs or small groups. *11 min.*
Give each group a different scripture to look at.
- Isaiah 11: 1 – 9
 - Zechariah 9: 9-10
 - Micah 5: 2-4
 - Isaiah 52: 13 – 15
- Instruct each group or pair to read their scripture and discuss. They should reflect on what life was like for God's people, and why a "messiah" would be important to them. Tell them to be prepared to share their passage with the class, lifting up descriptions of what a messiah is, and why they would look forward to a messiah.
- Waiting For Who?** **Read** Isaiah 44: 21 – 28 and Isaiah 45: 1 – 4 *8 min.*
Ask: Who do these passages say the Messiah is? (Cyrus)
- Explain:**
In that day, God used Cyrus to help God's people.
We will learn more about Cyrus and the Persians next week.
Christians often use passages from Isaiah to talk about Jesus.
- Ask:**
- Do you think prophetic scriptures that were fulfilled, like those discussing Cyrus, can also be about Jesus? Why?
- Writing For those Waiting** • As a class, or in small groups, think about concerns in the world today and compose a short message of hope. *12 min.*
• Write what you think God would have a prophet say to people.
- Ask:**
- How can the church bring words of hope to people?
 - Do we need a new message from God or do we already know the messages helping us to reach the needs of God's people?
 - How could your church do better in bringing hope to people in need?
- Prayer** Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. *2 min.*
Have each person share in the prayer, asking God to help bring hope to someone or a group of people.
The last person can close the prayer by saying, "Amen."



Lesson 26 *Cyrus and the Persians*

Teacher’s Notes:

Isaiah’s words are proven true as Babylon falls to the Persians, led by King Cyrus. Rather than making people convert to the religion of his kingdom, Cyrus’s plan was to incorporate the beliefs of all people. Cyrus seemed to believe a god exists, but wasn’t sure which gods were the true ones. Cyrus thought that by praying to a diversity of gods, he would cover his bases and best serve his people. By incorporating the beliefs of the newly conquered people, Cyrus kept people from rebelling for cultural reasons, and actually endeared himself to those who had been conquered. Compared to other empires and rulers, the Persians were a welcome change to many. To the Hebrews, one of Cyrus’ most popular acts was beginning the work to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Cyrus’s diversity brought a lot of change. It is in this time period that the Jewish community was influenced by Zoroastrianism. This belief system included competing powers of good and evil. Until this time, most people attributed all events in life to God. Good and bad events were given meaning based on the assumption that God cased or allowed them to happen. If bad things happened, one must have been sinful or their family had been sinful. This theological shift allows for the dating of many biblical texts.

Unfortunately, Cyrus reign ends before the temple is finished. He is succeeded by Artaxerxes (art-uh-zerk-sees). Hearing the concerns from Jerusalem’s neighbors, including stories of the trouble Jerusalem has caused for past kings, Artaxerxes puts an end to the building project.

Scriptures: Isaiah 45: 1 – 4
Ezra 1: 2 - 11
Ezra 4: 6 – 24

Supplies:

- Building supplies for “Design” project
- History of your church building or a person who knows the history

Preparation:

- Have supplies ready and clear space for class to work.
- Be able to talk about how your church was built, or have a guest who can talk about it.

Activity	Instructions	Time
Design	<p>Invite the youth to imagine they are sitting in the dusty ruins of where their church building used to be. Due to a massive storm, the building has been knocked down.</p> <p>Give the class paper and markers and instruct them to design a new church building. They can put whatever they want in their design. Tell them not to worry about a budget, just to put what they think is needed in the design. Encourage them to include details that will make the new church special.</p> <p>Provide some blocks, Legos, pop-cycle sticks, glue, and other supplies if they want to build a small model of their design. They can include more detail on the drawing but the model will allow them to show the shape.</p>	<i>12 min.</i>



You may want to divide the class into groups for this project. If you divide, give the class a chance to share their designs.

Build? As a class, ask them to make a list of all the things they would need to make their design happen. This should be money, tools, builders, building materials, etc. If the class doesn't mention permits and other requirements, make sure to share those for the list. *3 min.*

Extreme Temple Make-over **Read** Isaiah 45: 1 – 4 and Ezra 1: 2 - 11 *8 min.*
Ask:

- How was Cyrus different from past kings who conquered the land around Jerusalem?
- Do you think about Cyrus as a king / leader?
- Why would Cyrus want them to rebuild the temple?
- How do you feel about a “non believer” helping rebuild the temple?
- If Cyrus was helping other religions rebuild their sacred buildings, would it change your opinion of him?
- How do you feel about God using a “non believer” for such an important role in the history of God’s people?
- How does your government support your church’s work?
- How would a change in government change your church?

Our Building Share some history from your church’s current building with the class. This can be from a written history, notes, or a special guest who knows the history or was a part of the building process. This could also include any renovations or remodeling *8 min.*

Delays **Read** Ezra 4: 6 – 24 *8 min.*
Ask:

- Why was work on the temple stopped?
- How do you feel about Artaxerxes as a king leader?
- How do you think God’s people in Jerusalem felt when they were stopped from building?
- How could government hurt or hinder your church?
- Do you think either king should have been involved with rebuilding the temple? Why?
- How do you think these events changed how the people worshiped God?
- How do you think these events changed the community of God’s people?
- How important is the building where you worship?
- How important is feeling “safe” when you worship?
- How do you think feeling unsafe would change the way you worship?

Divisions & Decisions

Ask:

10 min.

- What complicated issues does our church and government struggle to find an answer for? (make a list of issues as the class lists them)
- How do government and church have conflict on modern issues?
- How does our government support all religions?
- How does our government favor some religions?
- How might it be easier to be a nation if everyone had the same religion?
- How would you feel about everyone having the same religion?
- How does diversity of beliefs help our nation?
- Which is more important: security or diversity? Why?

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands.
Ask each person to give thanks for something about their church building that is special to them.

2 min.





Lesson 27 Rebuilding Again: Ezra & Nehemiah

Teacher's Notes:

Ezra and Nehemiah have overlapping stories. Ezra is a prophet and spiritual leader living in or around Jerusalem. Nehemiah, an exile in service to King Artaxerxes, eventually goes to Jerusalem and becomes governor there.

Nehemiah is saddened by Artaxerxes' reversal of King Cyrus' policy towards Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. Artaxerxes sees the sadness in Nehemiah's face and questions him. Nehemiah explains, and asks for permission to go to Jerusalem and finish the rebuilding of the temple and its city walls. He also asks for papers for safe passage through the lands around Jerusalem. Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's requests.

Along with rebuilding the city, Nehemiah struggles to rebuild the community, which is in conflict as returning exiles and those who remained in the land are reunited and try to make a life together after 100 years apart. Nehemiah tries to bring the people back to God by separating from other peoples. There is a focus on being faithful to the covenant event to the point that Nehemiah has the city gates closed on the Sabbath. Foreign wives are discouraged, as is the practice of marrying daughters off to other peoples. Although many of these practices do not translate well into modern culture, Nehemiah's work is profound and had a major influence on the identity and history of the Hebrew people.

Scriptures: Haggai 2: 6 - 9
 Nehemiah 2: 1 – 10
 Ezra 5: 6 – 17
 Ezra 6: 1 - 12
 Nehemiah 11: 1 – 2

Supplies: Whiteboard and markers or poster

Preparation: Review the Biblical story of Lesson 26

Activity	Instructions	Time
Complaining Ask:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of things do you complain about? (make a list on whiteboard or poster) • What kinds of things do your friends complain about? (add to the list) • What kinds of things does your family complain about? (add to the list) • What do you think people complain about the most? • What is the difference between complaining and gossip? • What is the difference between complaining and “tattling?” • When is complaining a good thing? • When is complaining a bad thing? 	<i>5 min.</i>

Whining Remind the class of the events of Lesson 26. It is important to remember that King Cyrus gave orders for the temple to be rebuilt, and that Artaxerxes was responding to a letter of complaint from Jerusalem's neighbors when he stopped the building. *10 min.*



Read Haggai 2: 6 - 9

Read Nehemiah 2: 1 – 10

Ask:

- How do you think Nehemiah came to serve Artaxerxes?
- How does this decision by Artaxerxes change your view of him?
- How do you think Jerusalem’s neighbors will respond to this decision?

Read Ezra 5: 6 – 17

Ask:

- Is this complaining or “tattling?”

Deciding

Explain:

It seems that Artaxerxes does not receive the neighbors’ letter. Darius is King when the letter is received. Darius does some research and finds King Cyrus’ decree for the temple to be rebuilt and respects that wish.

Read Ezra 6: 1 – 12

Ask:

- What do you think of Darius as a king / leader?

**Building
Community**

Explain:

With Ezra as a spiritual leader and Nehemiah as Governor over the region, the temple and the Jerusalem walls are rebuilt, which took efforts of a lot of people. Many returned from exile to help build. This was not an easy transition for God’s people.

8 min.

Read Nehemiah 11: 1 – 2

Ask:

- If you had been taken from your home, and finally set free, how would you feel about having to rely on a drawing to see if you got to live in your hometown?
- If you lived in a house for 20 years, how would you feel if you had to rely on a drawing to see if the people who used to live there could have the house back and make you move out?

**Returning
And
Remaining**

Divide the class into two groups. Designate one group as “returnees” and the other as “remnants.” Remind the class that those taken into exile never returned—it was their grandchildren and great-grandchildren that did, only having heard about Jerusalem in stories. So, as the exiles ‘came home,’ the ruins of Jerusalem were not much like the ‘home’ their ancestors had told them about. Meanwhile, those who had

20 min.



not been taken into exile--the remnant—had filled roles in the community that they were not familiar with and built a community, sometimes using neighboring peoples to fill in their gaps. The return of the exiles was difficult for everyone as they tried to figure out how to share “home.”

Tell each group to prepare an argument for why they deserve special consideration in assignment of where to live in Jerusalem. Give each group about 5 minutes to come up with their arguments. Tell each group not to elect a spokesperson but to make sure each group member can explain their reasoning.

When you bring the groups back together, pair up members of opposite teams and have them debate one another, one-on-one, based on their group’s position.

Bring the group back together and ask class members to explain the opposition’s perspective based on their debates.

Ask:

- Which do you think was harder:
Rebuilding the temple and walls, or rebuilding the community?
- What kind of things do you think you would have done to rebuild the faith community?
- What do you think would happen if we “un-promoted” all of you for one year? (ex. 9th graders go back to 8th)
What would be different? Any conflicts? Why?
- What types of things divide communities today?
- How do we rebuild broken or hurting communities today?
- Is the past helpful or harmful in settling conflicts?

**Still
Complaining**

Look back at the list of complaints from earlier.

8 min.

Ask:

- How many of our complaints are due to community hurts?
- How do our complaints compare to those in our story today?
- What can you do to help settle complaints on this list?
- What do you do when you can “fix” a complaint?
- Where do you think God is working in the issues we complain about?
- What do you complain about to God?

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands.
Ask each person lift up one thing they complain about that they need to let go of.

2 min.



Lesson 28

Psalms to Review

Teacher’s Notes:

Although all of Psalms is poetic, there are many different types of psalms there. Some are prayers of lament. Others are lyrics of joy and praise. Some share the heart of God’s people and some cry out for help in times of crisis. Many of the psalms seem to have been used with music and as part of worship. Others seem like very personal and private poems written out of pain and fear. Throughout Psalms we can hear the expressions of faith, doubt, hope, and fear of God’s people over time. Although David is sometimes credited with the writing of Psalms, it is clear that the book has influences from the exiles that came after David, so we know that words and thoughts passed along in the Psalms were developed over time. Through these verses, we can hear echoes of our own laments, doubts, joys, and celebrations.

Scriptures: Psalms

Supplies:

- CD player, or laptop CD player or MP3 with speakers
- Church hymnals

Preparation:

1. Pick several songs and have a way to play them for the class.
 - Explore how music kept the Hebrew people going.
 - Look at older hymns and songs and think about how they kept the people of that day going.
 - Do the same thing with hymns and secular music sung today.
 - Consider: what are these songs about? What makes a song catch on?
 - What sorrows, longings, joys and celebrations can we see in each?
 - How does music reach each of us today?
2. Choose 4 – 5 Psalms that each has a different focus.
 - Match a Psalm to a historic event we have talked about
 - Match a Psalm to the feelings of the people
 - Find a Psalm that lifts up the needs of the people in prayer
 - Find a Psalm that sounds like it might fit that right time today

Activity	Instructions	Time
The Right Tone for You	Play a little bit of a few different songs. Make sure they are very different in genre and pace. Suggestions: classical, Heavy Metal, folk, Hip-hop Have class look for fears, sorrows, longings, joys and celebrations Ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are these selections similar?• How are these selections different?• Which one would you want to dance to? Why?• Which one would be most relaxing to you? Why?• Which one would you listen to when you are sad? Why?• What types of music do you listen to at home? Why?• What songs do you play for special occasions? Why?	15 min.



- How important is music in your life?
- Why do songs like Country Roads (West Virginia), Rocky Top (Tennessee), and Sweet Home Alabama Continue to be popular and well known?
- What songs remind you of a specific event or person? Why?

The Right Tone for the Time

Review the time line from the past nine lessons. 7 min.

Ask:

- Which situation faced by God’s people would have been the hardest for you? Why?
- If you lived through those events, what kind of music would you have wanted to listening to? Why?

Matching Game: Part 1

Split the class up into two groups. Give each a list of the Psalms listed below (see lesson’s last page). Have them read the Psalms, and match the one that they think would be the most appropriate for each event or time period from these recent lessons. There is no right answer but an example of how they might match up is here: 15 min.

Lesson 19	Amos Brings Bad News	Psalm 1
Lesson 20	Down South with Hezekiah and Josiah	Psalm 63
Lesson 21	Micah’s Three Things	Psalm 15
Lesson 22	Exiles and Remnants	Psalm 28
Lesson 23	Long Way From Home	Psalm 137
Lesson 24	Holy, Holy, Holy	Psalm 74
Lesson 25	Call for a Messiah	Psalm 23
Lesson 26	Cyrus and the Persians	Psalm 24
Lesson 27	Rebuilding Again: Ezra & Nehemiah	Psalm 147

Matching Game: Part 2

Work in the same two groups as in Part 1. Give each a copy of your church’s hymnal. Have them look through the hymnal and pick they think would be the most appropriate for each event or time period from recent lessons. Examples: 15 min.

“Rebuilding Again” – *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*

“Exiles & Remnants” – *O God, Our Help In Ages Past*

Have the two groups share their selections. Again, there are no right or wrong answers but they should have a reason for the songs they choose.

Prayer

Invite the class to look through the hymnals again . 8 min.
 Each person should pick out one line from a hymn to use as their offering in the closing prayer. They do not have to pray in any order and the lines do not have to match up with the person before or after them. When the class is ready, ask them to join hands in a circle and let each person share their line of the prayer. The last person can say “Amen” after their line.



MATCHING GAME:

Match the Lesson with the Psalm that you think would fit it best. Look up Psalms (use blanks for any notes you want to jot down about them), then match each to a lesson:

Psalm 1 _____

Psalm 15 _____

Psalm 23 _____

Psalm 24 _____

Psalm 28 _____

Psalm 63 _____

Psalm 74 _____

Psalm 137 _____

Psalm 147 _____

Psalm: Lesson: Title my notes about theme: _____

_____ 19: Amos Brings Bad News _____

_____ 20: Down South with Hezekiah and Josiah _____

_____ 21: Micah's Three Things _____

_____ 22: Exiles & Remnants _____

_____ 23: Long Way From Home _____

_____ 24: Holy, Holy, Holy _____

_____ 25: Call for a Messiah _____

_____ 26: Cyrus & the Persians _____

_____ 27: Rebuilding Again: Ezra & Nehemiah _____



Lesson 29

Ecclesiastes and Proverbs

Teacher's Notes:

Ecclesiastes and Proverbs are often categorized in Christian versions of the Bible as **wisdom literature**, joining Psalms, Job, and the Song of Solomon. The Jewish Tanakh categorizes these same books, along with Ruth, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, and the Chronicles as, “Writings.” Wisdom literature is found in many works outside of scripture and in many different cultures.

Ecclesiastes often causes great debate among scholars and church members alike. The book is often described as a basic explanation of ancient Jewish philosophy. The author of the book is referred to by the title, “Qoheleth” in the text. This title is often translated “leader of the assembly,” although other translations of the name usually having similar meaning. Although the text suggests in its opening that King Solomon (“son of David, king in Jerusalem”) is writer, not all of the text supports such a claim. Later in the book the author references the author’s identity as a wise sage who works among the people.

Proverbs is easier to understand than Ecclesiastes. It has many short pieces of advice that may have been gathered together from various sources, many ancient, by Solomon and others, for guidance of the Hebrew people. Many of the proverbs seem to be addressed from a teacher to pupils. These pupils may have been princes and other youth from royal and elite households. Some of the proverbs seem to be folk wisdom using common sense advice applicable to anyone. Scripture from Proverbs show up frequently in the books of the New Testament, showing their Jewish authors’ familiarity. When reading Proverbs, however, it is important to remember that the advice was written by and for a people, culture, and geography much different than any modern reader experiences today.

Scripture: Proverbs 2: 1 - 11
 Ecclesiastes 1: 1-11
 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8
 Ecclesiastes 4: 9 – 16

Supplies: Whiteboard and markers

Preparation: Think back on your own teachers and those who you see as wise.

Activity	Instructions	Time
How Do	Work as a class to come up with a definition of “wisdom.”	20 min.
You Know?	<p>Make sure everyone has a chance to give input. After you have that definition, give the group this list of words and ask them to come up with definitions for each of them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intelligence • Knowledge • Facts • ‘Street smarts’ • Common Sense • Understanding <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are these words alike or different from wisdom? • Has this definition list changed your definition of wisdom? • How is each of these terms “passed on” from one generation to the next? • Who passed on one of these to you? • What are the most important lessons others have passed down to you? • What lessons have you learned by <i>not</i> listening to others? • What lessons have you learned through scripture? 	



Secret Knowledge	Have the group sit in a circle so that everyone can see every other member of the group. Pick one volunteer to step out of the room. Those remaining should choose a leader. The volunteer is brought back into the room. The rest of the group must stay seated, but the group does everything the leader does. If the leader crosses his or her legs, the rest of the group follows. The volunteer must figure out who the leader is to end the game.	<i>10 min.</i>
Words of Wisdom	<p>Read Ecclesiastes 1: 1 – 11</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the writer’s point?• What lesson is the writer trying to teach?• How important do you think the teacher would say ‘work’ is?• If nothing changes, why should people work?• What wisdom do you take from this passage? <p>Read Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the writer’s point?• What lesson is the writer trying to teach?• How do we know when it is the right time for something?• Do you think there really is a time for everything? Why?• What wisdom do you take from this passage? <p>Read Ecclesiastes 4: 9 – 16</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the writer’s point?• What lesson is the writer trying to teach?• Would you rather be the lonely king, or poor and have friends?• Which of your friends do you think is wise? Why?• What wisdom do you take from this passage?	<i>10 min.</i>
Wise People	<p>Divide the class into pairs or groups of three. Invite each person to tell their partner(s) about a great teacher they have had (school, church, coach, family, etc.). Make sure everyone has a chance to share and listen.</p> <p>Once everyone has shared, have them make a list of common traits of their great teachers. When you bring the class back together, compile a list based on each group’s responses.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a formula or model for a perfect teacher? Explain.• How do you think you would do as a teacher?• How is teaching different from sharing wisdom?	<i>8 min.</i>
Prayer	Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. Ask each person to give thanks for a lesson or item of wisdom they have received in their life.	<i>2 min.</i>



Lesson 30

Song of Solomon

Teacher's Notes:

Along with Esther, Song of Solomon (often called, “Song of Songs,” or greatest of songs), is the only book of scripture that does not specifically mention God or faith. Unlike Esther, Song of Solomon does not even talk about the covenant, prayer, rituals, or any other religious tradition. The book is filled with intimate words of love and descriptions of beauty. Many see the Song of Songs as love poetry between a male and female lover, perhaps in bonds of a marriage, such as a literal bride and bridegroom. Others take the back-and forth dialogue to be symbolic, such as the depth of God’s love for the people, or Christ for his bride, the church.

Although King Solomon is often given credit for writing the book, most experts think it was written after Solomon’s time and later had his name attached to give the text more credibility. Some have suggested a female author because the book has more passages written from a female perspective than male. The author does seem to be a person of privilege because they know about wedding traditions and life in the royal court that would not have been common knowledge to those in a lower social class.

Note: Modeling and respecting appropriate leader-youth healthy boundaries is important in this lesson. Older or more savvy youth may bring up the extremely intimate symbolism of Song of Solomon and want to discuss details in class. If this occurs, you may want to acknowledge the symbolism, but note that this topic of study for them will need to be later in a different setting. The purpose of this lesson and leader’s direction is not to translate the symbolism for those who don’t understand it. Such a conversation may be considered privileged conversation to be first addressed by parents within their own families.

Scripture: Song of Solomon 2: 8 - 13
 Song of Solomon 3: 1-5
 Song of Solomon 4: 1 - 7
 Song of Solomon 8: 6 – 7

Supplies: Lyrics to love songs (www.lyrics.com is a great resource)

Preparation:

- Look up the lyrics to a few different love songs and print them out for the class. If possible, choose songs from many different generations.
- You might want to use some classic love songs or find some lyrics from different styles of music.
- Obtain several different translations of the Old Testament, including the NRSV, and the RSV if you can find an older copy.

Activity	Instructions	Time
What is Love?	<p>Read Song of Solomon 3: 1 - 15</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think this book was chosen to be in the Bible? • Is this the type of love usually talked about in the Bible? <p>Pass out copies of love songs. Let members of the class take turns reading them like poetry. See if the class can sing the song after reading the lyrics.</p> <p>Ask: • What is love? (yes, this is a loaded question)</p>	25 min.



Read Song of Solomon 8: 6-7

Ask:

- How does our culture treat love?
- Do you think that love is as powerful or important as it used to be? Why?
- How are love and faithfulness related?

Perfect Love?

Ask:

8 min.

- Do you believe in ‘love at first sight’? Why?
- Do you believe that love can last forever?
- How would you describe a “perfect love”?
- What kind of love are you looking for?

Christian Romance

Read Song of Solomon 4: 1 – 7
Song of Solomon 2: 8 - 13

15 min.

(You might have a different group member take each verse in Solomon 4:1-5 and consider how well it would ‘go over’ if spoken softly in trying to ‘romance’ a young woman of today.)

Ask:

- How well do you think the complements in Solomon 4: 1-5 would go over with most young woman you know today?
- How would most young men take the complements in Solomon 2: 8-13?
- What can clues in the writings tell you about the people and context which may have spoken or related to these words?
- What is and what is not appropriate for a Christian to say when complementing someone they find attractive?
- What is appropriate and inappropriate dating activity for Christians?
- Is romance different for one who is a Christian?
- What is the most romantic thing you have ever done (or seen done)?

What Did She Really Say?

Read: Song of Solomon 1:5. Have class members compare as many different translations of the Bible as can be found. Include a NRSV, and an older RSV if you can, for comparison.)

10 min

Ask:

- How does the bride describe herself in this passage?
- Do you notice a difference in the different translations? If so, what?

(In recent years, scholars have pointed out that while early English translators chose the conjunction here as, “I am black *but* lovely,” the scholars believe the more accurate translation is, “I am black *and* lovely,” seen increasingly in newer translations such as the NRSV. This passage is sometimes used to illustrate how translators’ own context and bias can creep into their interpretation, and why careful scholarship is needed in interpreting the meaning of scripture.

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. Ask each person to pray for someone they love, or offer a prayer for the kind of love they hope to find one day.

2 min.



Lesson 31 With Friends Like These... (Job)

Teacher's Notes:

Although Job (rhymes with “robe”) begins and ends with narratives that seem familiar in style to early stories from scripture, most of the book is written as dialogue. As a whole, the text is considered by most to be wisdom literature and probably was written as a teaching story about God and God’s purposes rather than a historical event.

Job is a difficult text to place in any timeline. Most scholars agree that Job shows signs of additions over time. Job also includes theological themes in the beginning that were not a part of Israel’s story until after the Persians came to power. The drama of the first two chapters sets the scene for Job but the rest of the book reads much differently. The bulk of the book is made up of conversation between Job and his friends. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come, out of concern for their friend, and begin a theological conversation about why Job has met with such misfortune.

Elihu joins the conversation in chapters 32-37. This voice seems to be a later addition to the text and is not referenced anywhere in the chapters before or after. In chapter 42, God speaks to the “friends” and Elihu is never mentioned. Chapter 42 ends with Job being restored.

Another character of interest is “the adversary” (Hebrew – *ha satan*). This is often translated as “Satan,” or “the Devil,” but the Hebrew word means “adversary” or “accuser.” The word is used in other places in the Hebrew Scriptures (Zechariah 3:1-2 , Chronicles 21:1) to describe people who stood against another, often in a role of getting people to speak in defense of their position or actions.

(Note: In leading this lesson about friends, be careful not to assume that all members of your class see themselves blessed with friends--or even one friend. This may be especially true with youth who are very shy or young, have moved a lot, live remotely, or have behavioral or other disabilities. Some may think that because they have no friends, something is wrong with them or they are unlovable--which can sometimes generate self-fulfilling unpopular behaviors. Try to have a sense of this as you think about your individual class members and tailor your leadership and words to fit their needs).

Scripture: Job 1 – 2:9
 Job 4: 1 – 8
 Job 8: 1 – 7
 Job 11: 1 – 8
 Job 42: 1 – 6

Supplies: Each student needs a Bible, or at least one per pair

Preparation: Think about humility and self-righteousness, and of how friends care for each other appropriately and inappropriately in times of struggle. Consider your class members carefully and their needs and uses of friends.

Activity	Instructions	Time
A “Good” Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw a large stick figure on a poster or whiteboard. • Leave room around the edges for writing. • Invite the class to design a “good Christian.” They can write in information about their character around the edges. Allow them to argue about different characteristics to include. 	15 min.



Let them decide about clothing, and whether it matters.
The process is as important as the outcome of this activity.

Ask:

- How do you compare yourself with this character?
- How realistic is this character?
- How do most Christians compare to this character?
- How do expectations of people compare to God's?
- How do we do living up to our own expectations?
- How do we do living up to God's expectations?

The Best Person?

Read Job 1 – 2:9

7 min.

Ask:

- How does Job compare with your “Good Christian?”
- How do you feel about God's treatment of Job?
- How do you think you would respond if you were Job?

The Best Answer!

Read Job 42: 1 – 6

4 min.

Ask:

- How does Job seem different?
- Can a person be righteous without being humble?
- What keeps you humble?
- How does a person be proud of faithfulness without becoming self-righteous?

The Worst Friends!

Explain that everyone has or at sometime in life will have friends they share with in helpful as well as unhelpful ways. Some friends will deal with our problems better than others. Job had three friends who visited him when his world fell apart. Their “speeches” are long and sometimes hard to read, but we are going to try and break down their responses to Job's suffering. Remember, Job never condemns God for what happens to him, even though he does complain about his suffering.

Eliphaz – Read Job 4: 1 – 8

Ask:

- Why does Eliphaz think Job is suffering?
- What does Eliphaz think about God and punishment?
- What kind of protection does faith give us from bad things?
- What kind of friend do you think Eliphaz was to Job?

Bildad – Read Job 8: 1 - 7

Ask:

- Why does Bildad think Job is suffering?
- What does Bildad think about God and punishment?
- Do you think it would be fair for God to punish Job for what his children and their families did?
- What kind of friend do you think Bildad was to Job?



Zophar – Read Job 11: 1 – 8

- Why does Zophar think Job is suffering?
- What does Zophar say about wisdom?
- How can one person judge another’s relationship with God?
- Do you think it would be fair for God to punish Job for thinking he was a righteous person?
- What kind of friend do you think Zophar was to Job?

Elihu Who?

Explain that Elihu is a fourth “friend” that seems to have been added by a later editor of the Book of Job. Elihu suggests that Job should have been proclaiming God rather than defending himself. He calls Job out as self-righteous. Elihu also challenges the other three “older” friends for failing to have enough wisdom to find an explanation to Job’s suffering. This may be one person or generation’s criticism of an the generation that wrote Job, and the ways they understood God differently. Since neither the others nor Job responds to Elihu, we will also skip him and focus on the other three friends.

2 min.

Best Friend?

Ask:

- How do friends you have had, and/or have known about in others’ situations, compare to Job’s friends?
- Can you think of examples of friends who have really helped or hurt in a time of need?
- How important is listening between friends?
- If you were a friend visiting Job, what would you have said to him?
- How does a judgmental friend make things harder?
- How does a self-righteous friend make things harder?
- How does a humble friend make things easier?
- What kind of friend do you think Job would have been to one of the other characters?
- Did any of Job’s friends just *listen* to him?
- Why do you think that people always seem to think they must say something to someone who is suffering?
- Is it better sometimes to just be with a friend and speak with silence?
- Where do you need to do better as a friend?

7 min.

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. Ask each person to give thanks for a friend who has been there for them in a time of need.

2 min.



Lesson 32 It Was on My List to Do... (Jonah)

Teacher’s Notes:

Jonah is a unique book among the Prophetic writings. Instead of recording the works of a prophet, it tells the story of a prophet. Jonah is a narrative that reads more like a folktale than a prophetic text. No one is able to accurately date the text so there is no real context to go by when studying Jonah. It is a story that could have taken place in many times and places, an attribute important to a great story that transcends time.

There are some important things to consider while helping the class with their retelling of the story. Really emphasize how much Jonah *HATED* Nineveh. You could compare it to rival towns or rival schools (sports rivals may stand out for the youth). Also consider that Jonah never actually went into town. The gate would have been a long way from the heart of the city. Don’t forget to emphasize the question at the end of the story. Most of all, have fun with the retelling.

Scripture: Jonah 1: 1 – 17
Jonah 2: 10
Jonah 3
Jonah 4

Supplies: Whiteboard and markers or poster and markers
CD player or MP3 and speakers

Preparation: Read the Jonah story a few times to make sure you remember the details while teaching.
Have music ready to play for final section if desired.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Instructions</u>	<u>Time</u>
The Story	Work as a class to make a time-line of the Jonah story from memory. Do not let anyone look the story up yet. Once you have a time-line of the story, divide the class into three groups. Give each group one of the following readings: Jonah 1: 1 – 17 and 2:10 Jonah 3 Jonah 4 Have the three groups come back together and fill in the details or correct the time-line.	20 min.

Ask:

- What parts of the story surprised you?
- What was Jonah’s message from God?
- What is the message of the book of Jonah to us?
- How does Jonah differ from other prophetic writings?
(story format, focus on the prophet as a character, etc.)



Um.. Thanks? Invite the class to make a list of gifts or things done for them that they did not really appreciate. For example, maybe they got an ugly sweater that their grandma, or a picture made by a little brother/sister/cousin that made them look silly. *5 min.*

Ask:

- Why do you think that Jonah was not happy to get to talk directly to God?
- How did Jonah feel about the gift of the bush?
- How feelings in you does Jonah’s attitude bring out?

Thanks, But No Thanks Invite the class to make a list of people outside of the classroom that they have a hard time liking. They don’t have to mention names. They can make up a nickname if needed. Ask them to include groups of people too, not just individuals. *8 min.*

Ask:

- What do these groups or individuals have in common?
- How easy is it for people to “get on your list”?
- How hard is it for people to “get off of your list”?
- Why do you think Jonah had Nineveh on his list?
- What would it feel like for God to send you to help people on your list?
- Would you want to see them repent, or refuse and get punished?
- Do you think Jonah’s task from God fair or unfair? Why?

Cover Story Invite the class to split up into pairs and share with each other a story of avoiding responsibility. After they have all had a chance to share, invite them to bring at least one of their stories back to the whole class. *8 min.*

Ask:

- How does Jonah’s attempt to sail away from God compare with our class’s best efforts to avoid things?
- What were the problems with Jonah’s plan?
- Do you think Jonah has a choice in doing God’s will?
- Do you think Jonah was treated fairly by God? Why?

Your Story **Explain:** I am going to ask you some questions to think about. Do not answer out loud. We will take some quiet time for you to reflect on your answers in private. (You may spread out if you would like, to get some private space.) *7 min.*

Ask:

- Have you ever avoided things God calls you to do?
- Have you ever avoided caring for or helping someone?
- What excuses do you give God?

Silence:

If you want to play some music to help set a mood, that is fine, but silence has a power of its own. Give them 2 to 4 minutes depending on your class's need and ability. When time is up, invite them to come back together as a class.

Ask:

- Does anyone have anything they would like to share?
(do not push if no one speaks up)

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands. Ask each person to share a silent prayer, asking God to forgive them for a time they ran away from responsibility. They may also ask God to help them face responsibility in the future. All of these prayers are to be done in silence. They can squeeze the hand of the person next to them to pass the prayer when done. When it comes back to the leader, they can say, "Amen."

2 min.





Lesson 33

Esther’s Risk and Reward

Teacher’s Notes:

Esther is a strange book in that God is never directly mentioned in it. However, Esther is important to Jewish history and identity, as the book gives the story of how the Feast of Purim began. Each year, Jewish families read the story of Esther together to begin this special time of celebration. The book also gives more information of life for the Jewish exiles. For these and other reasons, Esther is an important story to Hebrew scriptures. The themes of family, courage, and faith against human authority are important themes to Judaism and Christianity alike.

An interesting theme to those teaching Esther is that the king dismisses Queen Vashti for failing to show obedience to the King’s command, a similar reason that Ha`man is angered by the behavior of Mordecai (MORE-de-kie). Ironically, Vashti is stripped of her title of Queen because she does not come when the King commands, but Esther risks a fatal error by coming to the King for help when he does not command. These ironies are given another layer of interest to the text and highlight the complexities in which most ethical issues must be examined.

Scripture: Esther 2: 15 – 18
 Esther 3: 1 – 6
 Esther 4: 6 – 17
 Esther 7

Supplies:

- Whiteboard and markers or poster
- Bibles
- M&Ms, Skittles, or other similar treats
- Snacks (worth winning)

Preparation: Read the book of Esther. It isn’t that long and reading through the story will bring out other ironies that you may want to point out while teaching.

Activity	Instructions	Time
Risk Game	Give each member of the class ten M&M’s or other similar treats on a napkin, but no one can touch the treats until the leader gives notice at the end of the game. Invite each person to play, “Rock, Paper, Scissors” with other members of the class. <i>(Directions for playing Rock-Paper-Scissors can be found online, such as on Wikipedia).</i> Before each round, both players put forth one or more M&Ms (each the same number). Each round’s winner gets all of the M&Ms put forth before that game. <i>(To avoid handling the M&Ms, push them with a napkin).</i> Players must have at least one M&M to play. No one is forced to play at all; they can ‘sit on’ their M&Ms if they choose. Once everyone has had a chance to play several rounds, stop the game, count to see who has the most M&Ms (the grand winner (could get the rest of the bag of treats).	10 min.

Ask:

- How did the reward compare to the risks you took?
- What risks do you take in other games?
- Do you ever ‘play games’ that risk your health?
- Do you participate in any activities that risk your health?
- What are the biggest risks you take?

Risk Taking

Invite the class to make a list of things, causes, people or issues for which people will risk their lives. *15 min.*
Write down their answers on a poster or on a whiteboard.

Once you have a list, go back over the list and have the class explain why someone would risk their life for each.

Go back over the list a third time and have them label each item as an issue of rush, conscience, helplessness, time, trouble, or other.

a ‘Rush’ = things people do for the rush, or adrenaline high.

Conscience = taking a stand for an ethical reason.

Helpless = not to try or to take a stand, just as dangerous.

Time = risking life while in a hurry to get somewhere, ‘running late’

Trouble = not wanting to face the hassle/stigma of preventing the risk.

Ask:

- Which of these reasons for risking your life on putting it on the line do you think is worth the risk?
- Which cause on your list is the most noble? Why?
- Which cause is the least worthy? Why?
- Are there any issues on the list where people on both sides are risking their lives over an issue of conscience?
(Who is right and who is wrong?)
(How do you stop such a conflict?)
- What responsibility do people of faith have as participants in such conflicts?
- What responsibility do people of faith have in helping end such conflicts?
- Which cause on your list (or other) would be most willing to risk your life for? Why?

Risk Takers

Read Esther 2: 15 – 18 *30 min.*

Ask:

- What qualifications do you think a person should have to be a leader?
- What attributes should keep someone *from* being a leader?
- Should leaders be held to a higher standard of behavior?
- How should a person’s ethnicity be factored into selecting leaders?



Read Esther 3: 1 – 6

Ask:

- What are Mordecai's issues with Ha`man?
- Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow to Ha`man?
- How do Mordecai's issues compare with those on your list?
- What would you do in Mordecai's situation (is your choice influenced by the outcome?)
- How does Ha`man's plan to destroy the Jews compare to other issues on your list?
- What would you do if you knew about a plot to attack an ethnic minority?
- What would you do if you knew about a plot to attack (based on ethnicity) one person who was a minority ?
- What would you do if you knew about a plot to spread untrue rumors about an ethnic minority?
- What would you do if you heard jokes told about an ethnic minority?
- Why do you think Ha`man want to lash out at all of the Jews?
- Where do modern ethnic prejudices get formed?
- How is prejudice different for people who look alike, compared to those with features that make their differences obvious, such as skin or eye color?

Read Esther 7

Ask:

- How do you feel about the outcome of Ha`man's plan?
- What would have been the most just outcome?
- How do you feel about Esther in this story?

Read Esther 4: 6 – 17

Ask:

- How does this change your view of Esther?
- How does Esther's cause compare with those on your list?
- How do you think you would have responded if you were Esther?

Prayer

Invite the class to form a circle and join hands.
Ask each person to lift up a prayer for an issue or cause where people's lives are at risk.

2 min.