

Adult Teaching Resources

September 9, 2018



Doing, and Being (September 2-November 25)

Deuteronomy 4:1-15 (RCL 4:1-2, 6-9) – “Following Through”

Psalm 146 – “Trusting God”

Isaiah 50:4-9 (RCL 50:4-9a) – “Standing Firm”

Psalm 1 – “Living Wisely”

Psalm 124 – “Offering Praise”

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Trusting God

Psalm 146

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.” Psalm 146:2

We all desire to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. We find meaning and fulfillment where we can—family, work, art, community, solitude, etc. Today, we begin an exploration of finding what it takes to live a meaningful and happy life. We begin our journey with Psalm 146.

Opening

After everyone arrives, move to the board or large sheet of paper already taped to the wall. Ask your group to share their ideas of what a meaningful and happy life consists of. As they share, write their answers for all to see.

Spend some time discussing each idea and talk about how to achieve them. Pay special attention to where and how God fits in to each idea. Is God a part of the larger plan?

Reading the Bible

Today’s Bible activity will be different than our regular question and answer approach. Form smaller groups of 3-4 in each group and have each group create a “Reverse Paraphrase” of Psalm 146. A “Reverse Paraphrase” is an exercise to write the opposite of what the passage actually says. Some in your group might not feel comfortable re-writing scripture this way. Let them pass. But, for those willing to explore, this activity has the possibility to open up new levels of biblical understanding.

Give each group paper and a pen, and make sure they have a copy of the passage.

Ask them to read through the passage, getting the intent and meaning of the Psalm. Then, ask them to think of the opposite of what each verse says, or the opposite of what the entire Psalm says. Have them begin writing those thoughts and ideas down. Ultimately, they will create a new Psalm 146, that is the opposite in meaning of the true passage.

For example, verse 1 begins, “Praise the Lord, O my soul!” One possible “Reverse Paraphrase” of that beginning could be, “Curse you, God. My entire being repels you.” It does sound harsh, but it certainly presents an opposite meaning and gives some clarity to “Praise the Lord.”

Reading the Bible *continued*

Give each group time to write and then ask everyone to share their new psalm.

Discuss the similarities and differences between the “Reverse Paraphrases.” Discuss the differences between what they wrote and the scripture passage.

Ask this question for greater clarity:

What insights did you learn about God from the “Reverse Paraphrase” exercise?

Making Connections

Our Lesson Writer says, “Psalm 146 is the prayer of an individual who has experienced divine aid and who desires to give public testimony of God’s help through corporate worship.” What testimony can you share about your experience in receiving divine aid?

Our psalmist uses the word “praise” four times in the first two verses. What does praise mean to you? How do you praise God? What does praising God mean to you?

When is it easy for you to praise God? When is praising God difficult? Are there moments in life when praising God is the last thing on your mind? Share your experiences.

What is worship to you? When do you know you have participated in “good” worship? Is worship important? Why do you say that?

Where do we put our trust and hope? When do you think God is please with our decisions?

When you think of God, what is your list of all the great things God has done? When was the last time you shared this list with someone?

What has God done in your life that your first response was, “Hallelujah!”?

So What?

Ask your group to get back in the smaller groups from the beginning of class. With the “Reverse Paraphrase” in hand and the actual passage in front of them, ask each group to re-write the psalm, in paraphrase, making it relevant and applicable for today.

Give everyone time to complete their psalm and then have a time of group sharing.

Discuss the similarities and differences in the new psalms. What insights did they learn about God from writing the “Reverse” and writing the real paraphrase?

The Challenge

This week, pay attention to what God is doing in your life. Whenever you see the goodness of God, say “Hallelujah!” And then, share what God has done with something else, testifying to God’s goodness in your life.

Prayer

Loving God, we say “Hallelujah!” for all the good things you’ve done and continue to do in our lives. We praise you for the love and grace and give us. We praise you for taking care of us. We praise you for walking with us during the bad moments of life. We praise your name! Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Hallelujah psalms—The last five songs of the psalter, including today’s text, are all hymns of praise, and they all share the same beginning and ending: the Hebrew word *halelu-yah*. The compound word is straightforward, meaning “Praise Yah!” (“Yah” was a common abbreviation for “Yahweh”). So, whenever we say “Hallelujah!” we are not only speaking Hebrew, but using the personal name God revealed to Israel.

Happiness—The word translated as “happy” in v. 5 *is’āšrê*, a plural construct form that is usually translated “happiness” or “blessedness.” It comes from a root that means “to go straight,” or “to advance.” Those who put their hope in Yahweh do not wander about in a morass of uncertainty, but go forward in joyful trust.

We find a similar situation in Jesus’ “Beatitudes” of Matthew 5: though most translations have “Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are those who mourn ... , etc., the word translated as “blessed” is *Makarios*, which could also mean “happy,” as rendered in the Good News translation.

God’s mission—God’s concern for those who are poor and oppressed, homeless or blind is echoed not only in this psalm and other Old Testament texts, but in Jesus’ “mission statement” of Luke 4:18-19, a loose quotation of Isaiah 61:1:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Does the Bible promise deliverance from every trial?

A primary problem in interpreting these texts – whether in the psalms, the prophets, or the words of Christ – is that their apparently confident claims don't always come true. Many people remain poor and oppressed throughout their lives. There are widows, orphans, and homeless persons who never rise above poverty level. Sometimes justice is not done. *Is the promise of God's help nothing but smoke, or do we fail to understand how the promise is to be understood?*

The ancient Hebrews expected the Messiah to set all things right, but Jesus' agenda did not include healing for every sick person or earthly wealth for all who were poor. Jesus himself acknowledged that the poor would always be among us (Matt. 26:11). Human society will never overcome its proclivity for social injustice. Thus, we must look for God's help in an *internal* sense, and an *eternal* one. Those who are poor – those who trust in God, at least – may be assured that their place in eternity will be much kinder than their fate on earth. Jesus pointed this out in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lu. 16:19-31).

But is there no hope for this life? No light in the darkness? Of course there is! The presence of God can bring inner serenity even in the bleakest of human circumstances. Those who trust in God may find spiritual strength to endure the most difficult days. In fact, many people have discovered that it is in those places – when life has dealt its harshest cards – that God's presence seems most real.

I once heard a man say “I didn't realize that God was all I needed until God was all I had.” Can you resonate with that? You, like the psalmist, may have experienced the kind of blessing in disguise that led Jesus to say “Blessed are you who are poor . . . who hunger now . . . who weep” (Lu. 6:20-21).

Outward circumstances may argue otherwise, but those who put their trust in God may experience genuine blessings both internally and eternally.