

Adult Teaching Resources

October 14, 2018



Doing, and Being (September 2-November 25)

Genesis 2:18-24 – “Being Equal”

Psalm 90 (RCL 90:12-17) – “Gaining Perspective”

Isaiah 53:4-12 – “Redeeming Love”

Jeremiah 31:7-9 – “Saving Grace”

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Gaining Perspective

Psalm 90 (RCL 90:12-17)

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

“So teach us to count our days, that we may gain a wise heart.” *Psalm 90:12*

Is your glass half-empty, half-full, or are you happy to simply have a glass?

Life is mix of half-empty, and half-full moments. Perspective is important. In today’s Psalm, we explore a prayer for that hope that the two will equal out.

Opening

After everyone arrives, ask the group to stand in the middle of the room. Move to one side and point to the left and say this side is the glass half-empty. Point to the right and say this is the glass half-full. When you think of your glass, move to the side that best reflects your perspective.

From where folks are standing, ask for volunteers to share why they chose to stand where they did.

As you think about where you stand, what is your prayer? Is it a prayer of thankfulness, a prayer asking for help, or a combination prayer?

Reading the Bible

According the psalmist, what has God been? (dwelling place for all generations)

How long has God been God? (before the mountains were brought forth, before the earth was formed, from everlasting to everlasting)

What happens to us? (we are turned back to dust)

What is the passing of a thousand years like? (yesterday when it is past, like a watch in the night)

What does God do with the past? (sweep them away)

What consumes us? (God’s anger) What overwhelms us? (God’s wrath)

What have we set before God? (our iniquities, our secret sins)

How do our years come to an end? (like a sigh)

Reading the Bible *continued*

How long are our days? (seventy years, or perhaps eighty)

What will give us a wise heart? (awareness of our days)

What do we want to satisfy us? (God's steadfast love)

What do we ultimately ask? (the favor of the Lord our God upon us and prosper in the work of our hands)

Making Connections

When you ascribe greatness to God, what words do you use? Does any of your praise sound like our psalmist in verses 1-2?

What is humanity's role in God's creation? What is our relationship with God in creation?

If God is all powerful, all knowing, all present, and all powerful; and we are nothing but dust—how does that make you feel? Does that give you hope or leave you in despair? Explain.

Our Lesson Writer asks and answers the question, "And why is human life so short? For the psalmist, it is due to God's anger: "For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance" (vv. 7-8)." What do you make of God's anger? What consequences do we face because of it?

Our Lesson Writer says, "he took a decidedly negative attitude toward the days allotted to him. Even for those who live to an old age, he said, "their span is only toil and trouble, they are soon gone, and we fly away" (v. 10b)." What is your attitude to the days allotted to you? Where does that attitude come from?

What challenges and obstacles have you faced and overcome? How much of those success were directly attributed to you? How much was directly attributed to God?

When you experience prolonged suffering and trial, what is your prayer? How do you speak about God? How do you speak to God? What is your ultimate hope?

So What?

Ask everyone to form small groups of 3-4 in a group. Share these words from the end of our written lesson:

"Humans – in life as in science fiction – often focus our hopes on other people, but there are things even the most loving and capable humans cannot do for us. Our true hope for joyful living is in the one who created life: 'Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper the work of our hands – O prosper the work of our hands!'"

So What? *continued*

Ask each group to consider these questions for small group discussion:

How do we know when it's time to trust someone else with a situation we face?

How do we know who to turn to and trust in those moments?

How do we let go of our insecurities and trust others?

How do we know when it's time to trust God with a situation we face?

How do we let go of our insecurities and trust God?

What success stories can you share about trusting others?

What success stories can you share about trusting God?

Give each group time to share and then open the floor for large group sharing.

As you listen to groups and individuals share, ask this final question:

After exploring today's passage, do you want to change your position on glass half-full or glass half-empty? Why do you say that?

The Challenge

This week, use the hymn "Trust and Obey" as your daily prayer.

When we walk with the Lord
In the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way;
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.

Prayer

Loving God, we are a glass half-full and glass half-empty people. You supply the glass and the water, and then our experience and perception tells us the rest. Help us to see the gifts you give and not on what we lack. 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.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary text for the day is Psalm 90:12-17, which is an odd choice, given that the psalm’s primary divisions are vv. 1-12 and 13-17. Verse 12 relates to the verses that come before, so we are much better served by studying the entire chapter.

Books of psalms—The psalms are traditionally divided into five unequal “books,” as follows: 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. This was apparently done for liturgical reasons, probably to coincide with readings from the five books of the Torah.

Note that today’s text begins the fourth book.

Not Moses?—Despite traditions associating Genesis-Deuteronomy with Moses, overwhelming evidence points to a multiplicity of authors. Genesis 3 comes from a source typically known as J, or the “Yahwist.” Writings by this author use the name “Yahweh,” and portray God as sometimes appearing in human form, interacting personally with humans.

Really long lives—If you think the lifespans accorded to the descendants of Adam in Genesis 5 are long, consider a tradition among the Sumerians, who also held to a tradition about a flood. A famous Sumerian king list, which appears to include both actual and mythological rulers, names eight kings who ruled prior to the flood, with their reigns ranging from 18,600 to 43,200 years each: a total of 241,200 years! After the flood, the lifespans of succeeding kings were much shorter. (A translation of *The Sumerian King List*, by Thorkild Jacobsen, can be found here: <https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/as11.pdf>).

The Sumerian king list has long been of interest to biblical scholars, for Genesis also portrays eight generations from Adam to Noah, and much longer lifespans before the flood than afterward

I’ll Fly Away—Lyrics to “I’ll Fly Away” can be found here: http://www.popularhymns.com/ill_fly_away.php. A number of video versions, including this one by Alison Kraus, can be found on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BPoMIQHwpo>).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Does God repent?

Verse 13 of Psalm 90 calls on God to *repent*, using the same word (*shub*) used for human repentance. The word literally means “to turn around.” It does not suggest that God has been doing evil and needs to repent of it, but that the psalmist hopes God will change directions, turning from wrath and showing compassion instead.

The Old Testament contains several examples in which God is said to have repented, in the sense of regretting a past decision. Genesis 6:6-7 says that God regretted having created humankind, and 1 Samuel 15:11 portrays God’s frustration and sorrow over having chosen Saul to be king.

In Exodus 32, God threatened to consume the wanton Israelites and start over with Moses, but Moses prayed for God to turn from anger and remember God’s promises to the patriarchs, “And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (Exod. 32:14). Here a verbal form of *nacham* is used, a word that often means “comfort” but can also mean “relent.”

Both 2 Samuel 24:16 and 1 Chronicles 21:15 describe a plague God had brought in response to David taking a census. After David offered a sacrifice and prayed, Yahweh “relented from the calamity” and stopped the destroying angel.

Several other verses speak of God relenting from harm planned against someone (Psalm 106:45; Jer. 18:8, 26:3, 13, 19, 42:10; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9-10, 4:2). A common thread runs through these: they portray an instance in which God had threatened to destroy, but relented when the people sought God and changed their ways. In other words, when the people turned away from their evil, God turned away from punishments previously announced: it’s not so much a change of mind, but that God proves true to God’s nature, forgiving those who repent.

Even so, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of times when things have gone too far and there would be no change of mind, that judgment would come (Jer. 4:27-28, Ezek. 24:14). While both speak of judgment, they do not imply total destruction: there is always a remnant.

God always acts in divine freedom—which thankfully includes the freedom to forgive.