

Adult Teaching Resources

January 2, 2022



Season after Christmas

Psalm 147:1-20—"A Good Beginning"

In Christ We Have ...

Season of Epiphany

Acts 8:4-17 (RCL 8:14-17)—"Amazing Grace"

1 Corinthians 12:1-11—"Amazing Gifts"

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a—"Amazing Oneness"

1 Corinthians 13:1-13—"Amazing Love"

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“A Good Beginning”

Psalm 147:1-20

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

Key Verse

Psalm 147:10-11—

“His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.”

Opening

After everyone arrives, spend a few minutes catching up from the holidays and then ask your group to form smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is settled, ask everyone to consider these questions as we begin a new year.

As you think about your relationship with God and your faith journey...

What was last year like for you?

What are you feeling right now?

Where do you hope to be with your relationship a year from now?

Give everyone time to think and then share within their small groups.

As time allows, open the floor for volunteers to share with the larger group before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

How is the Lord described? (gracious) What is fitting for the Lord? (a song of praise)

What does the Lord do for Jerusalem and Israel? (builds up Jerusalem and gathers the outcasts of Israel)

What does the Lord do for the brokenhearted? (heals them and binds up their wounds)

What does the Lord do for the downtrodden? (lifts them up and casts the wicked to the ground)

How does the psalmist say we should respond to the Lord? (Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What does the Lord do for creation? (He covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, and makes grass grow on the hills)

How does the Lord care for the animals? (He gives to the animals their food, and to the young ravens when they cry)

In what does the Lord take delight? (the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love)

What does the Lord do for Jerusalem and her children? (the Lord strengthens the bars of your gates and he blesses your children)

What else does the Lord do for Israel? (the Lord grants peace within her borders and he fills her with the finest of wheat)

What does the Lord give? (He gives snow like wool and he scatters frost like ashes)

What does the Lord's word do to the snow, frost, and hail? (He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow)

Who does the Lord declare his word and statutes to? (He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel)

Why should Israel praise the Lord? (He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances)

Making Connections

When have you been away from a favorite place and had the opportunity to return? Where was the place? How did you feel about returning? What did you find when you got there? Was it better or worse than you expected?

Our Lesson Writer explains the struggling rebuilding effort under governor Sheshbazaar. "He ordered workers to clear the temple site, and priests built an altar so they could again offer sacrifices. Neighboring provinces opposed the rebuilding efforts, however, and times were hard. Residents focused on building houses and establishing farms for themselves, leaving the temple unfinished." When faced with the challenge of returning from exile and captivity, what is your opinion of the effort to focus on houses and farms first? Where in the priority list should the temple be?

How important is "place" and "building" when we talk about worshipping God? Has your understanding and emphasis on "place" and "building" shifted over the years? Explain?

What is the best modern-day response to God's ongoing display of grace? How often do we respond to God in that way?

Our Lesson Writer tells us "the psalmist changes gears, amazed that the same God who could count and name every star also cared for the hard-pressed people of Jerusalem (v. 4)." When

Making Connections *continued*

have you felt so close to God that you were certain, without any doubt whatsoever, that God cared for you and knew your name? Share that experience.

What is your favorite hymn or song of praise to God? How often do you sing it with others? How often do you sing it alone?

How has God been good in your life and in the circle of the world you find yourself in? Be specific as you list the ways.

Our Lesson Writer explains, “The injunction to “fear the LORD” is especially common in Israel’s Wisdom literature, which insists that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7, 9:10; see also Ps. 111:10 and Prov. 4:7). In this context, “fear” does not suggest fright, but a sense of reverence and respect for God that goes deep enough to motivate someone to live faithfully in relationship with God.” What role does reverence and respect for God play in your life? What motivates you to live faithfully in relationship with God?

What is on your list of the reasons we need to praise God?

So What?

Ask your group to gather back together in their small groups from the beginning of the lesson. Pass out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil to each group. Then, have everyone consider this question:

When you think of all the good God does, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Record the answers on the piece of paper.

Then, ask a second question, When you think of all the good God does, what is the second thing that comes to mind?

Record the answers on the piece of paper.

Then, ask the question a third time, When you think of all the good God does, what else comes to mind?

Record the answers on the piece of paper.

Next, ask each small group to share thoughts on this question:

With all the good that God does, what is the best way we can praise God and thank God?

Give each group time to share, then open the floor for larger group conversation and discussion.

The Challenge

This week, as we begin a New Year, try everyday to praise God for the good God does. Praise God in a way that is significant to you and meaningful to God.

Prayer

Loving God, you are wonderful and worthy of our praise. Too often we take you for granted and get stuck in living in the routine of life. Open our eyes to all that you do and fill our hearts with praise to be shared with you everyday of this year. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, 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.

One psalm, or two, or three?—The Revised Common Lectionary text for the Sunday after Christmas is Psalm 147:12-20. Some commentators believe Psalm 147 is a combination of what were originally two or three psalms, and the LXX (an early Greek translation) divides it into two parts, with the first 11 verses numbered as Psalm 146 and vv. 12-20 as Psalm 147 (other psalms in the LXX are also numbered differently).

All of Psalms 146-50 begin and end with the word “Hallelujah,” as does Ps. 147. There is an essential unity in Psalm 147 as it appears, so we will include a brief look at all three sections in today’s lesson.

Rebuilding the temple—The account of the temple’s rebuilding can be found mainly in the book of Ezra, along with the prophetic works of Haggai and Zechariah.

The Second Temple—The dedication of the rebuilt temple in 515 BCE marks the beginning of what scholars call the “Second Temple Period.” Most scholarly references to the Second Temple, however, focus on the temple of the late first century BCE and the first 70 years of the first century CE, after Herod remodeled and greatly expanded the temple and rabbinic Judaism was reaching its greatest influence. That temple was razed by the Romans in 70 CE, and has never been rebuilt.

Haggai and Zechariah?—The LXX adds the names Haggai and Zechariah after the introductory “Hallelujah” in vv. 1 and 12. It does not include words of attribution, such as “by” or “according to,” but simply reads “Hallelujah, Haggai and Zechariah; sing praises....” The awkward construction may indicate a belief that Haggai and Zechariah had something to do with the writing of the psalm, or it may be a tribute to them for their role in promoting the postexilic rebuilding of the temple, referenced in v. 2. In either case, the addition adds support for a postexilic setting for the psalm.

Build, or rebuild?—Translating v. 2 calls for a bit of interpretation. The verb translated as “build up” in the NRSV simple means “to build.” If we are correct in setting the psalm in the postexilic period, however, the translation “rebuilds” (as in NET) would be appropriate.

Likewise, the word NRSV translates as “outcasts” could refer to anyone who had been banished or driven away from their homes. To emphasize the postexilic setting, the NET translates the word as “exiles.”

Gates and dates—The reference to God’s strengthening Jerusalem’s city gates suggests that Psalm 147 was written during or after the governorship of Nehemiah, who not only led efforts to rebuild the city’s protective walls and gates (Nehemiah 2-6), but (with Ezra’s help) to re-educate the people on the history and significance of the covenant ordinances guiding their relationship with God (Nehemiah 8-9).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What was God's "word" to Israel?

The psalmist's various references to God's "word" in Ps. 147:15-20 are interesting in their variety, and in what they suggest to us about our own use of the term "God's word." Some Bible readers and interpreters through the years have tended to take virtually every mention of "God's word" as a reference to the Bible, but the Bible as we know it did not exist in the time of the psalmists or the prophets—or even the time of Jesus. No biblical author wrote with a conscious awareness that he or she was contributing to something that would later be considered holy scripture.

Hebrew has two primary terms that can be translated as "word," *amar* and *dabar*. Both can also take on the meaning of "command" or "order." The word *dabar* can also be translated as "thing."

The poet behind Psalm 147 used both terms, often in the sense of a "command." The NRSV translation of v. 15 says "He sends out his command (*amar*) to the earth; his word (*dabar*) runs swiftly." Later, God "sends out his word (*dabar*)" to melt the ice and snow (v. 18). In these verses, God's word is God's command to the forces of nature.

When we come to v. 19, we find two lines in synonymous parallel: "He declares his word to Jacob" is equivalent to "his statutes and ordinances to Israel." Here the psalmist would have had in mind things like the covenant commands found in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, as well as in other legal materials scattered throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, all of which claim to be words from God.

The heart of the covenant with Israel, as taught in the book of Deuteronomy, is that God's people should love the Lord with all of their being and teach their children to do the same (Deut. 6:4-9). The understanding was that God promised blessings to those who lived in covenant obedience, and trouble to those who chose idolatrous ways instead.

The books of Joshua through 2 Kings built on the teachings of Deuteronomy to relate Israel's history from that singular perspective, noting the times when either individuals or the nation prospered or floundered, based on their willingness to live within the covenant and honor Yahweh. When prophets like Samuel, Elijah, or Elisha reminded them of the covenant, they used terms like "thus says (*amar*) the LORD" (Judg. 6:8, 1 Sam. 10:18, 2 Sam. 12:7, 1 Kgs. 20:42, 2 Kgs. 7:1, and many others).

Pre-exilic prophets like Amos, Micah, and Isaiah warned the Hebrews that trouble would come if they did not honor God, speaking in oracles that likewise claimed to be words from the LORD (Isa. 7:7, Amos 5:4, Mic. 4:6, plus scores of other examples). The exilic prophets

The Hardest Question *continued*

Jeremiah and Ezekiel explained to the exiles—as a word from God—how they had rebelled and why they deserved their fate, but could still have hope through repentance (Jer. 2:5, Ezek. 5:5, et. al.). Post-exilic prophets like Haggai and Zechariah urged the Hebrew remnant that returned to Jerusalem to be a faithful and holy people if they expected to prosper (Hag. 1:2, 5, 7; Zech. 1:3; and many more).

Psalmists such as the author of Psalm 147 reflected this same theology in calling the former exiles to not only praise God for blessings given, but to live in such love and obedience that future benisons would be assured.

The Bible speaks often of the “word of the LORD,” or “God’s word,” always in the sense of God sending a prophetic word or declaring a command that the people should follow. Modern readers should be skeptical of taking that term and automatically applying it to the Bible as a whole. Rather, we should take the Bible seriously enough to recognize what it claims to be God’s word, and what it does not.