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Senior High Bible Teacher

WINTER QUARTER

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The Weeks Ahead

With our finite minds, we may have a difficult time comprehending the overflowing, eternal, lavish love of God. This winter quarter's theme will warm our hearts and help us understand the love of God. There are two short units and one longer unit, and the first unit of four lessons in December will help prepare our minds and hearts for Christmas.

Lesson 1 from Lamentations offers great hope for all believers, especially during times of tragedy. Even though it is not a traditional Christmas prophecy, Isaiah 62 in lesson 2 shares the promise of salvation for Zion.

Two New Testament lessons from the Gospel of John will lead us to worship Jesus Christ as our Savior and celebrate salvation that is for the whole world. Lesson 3, from the powerful opening text of John 1, is our Christmas lesson. John 3, in lesson 4, is two days after Christmas, when we will overhear the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus about why Jesus came and how to be born again.

Our second unit has three more lessons from John. Its theme is "Jesus' Love for the World." Lesson 5 comes from John 10, Christ's illustration of the Good Shepherd. We will also explore two "I AM" statements in this passage. Lesson 6 focuses on Jesus' new commandment from John 13. We will establish the centrality of love to Christianity, which will be a foundation for the rest of the quarter. Lesson 7 will wrap up the second unit and prepare the class for the rest of the quarter. In John 14, Jesus taught that followers can demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments.

The third unit has six lessons from John's three epistles. These short letters teach us how to live out God's love.

Lesson 8 is from 1 John 2:3-17. Its topic is the dangers of walking in darkness. Lesson 9, from 1 John 3, explores the essence of sin, including the difference between living in open sin and rebellion versus slipping up and falling short.

The last two lessons from 1 John focus on love in action. Lesson 10 highlights how we ought to be loving to our brothers and sisters in Christ, while lesson 11 emphasizes how we should love and trust God to show that we belong to Him.

Lesson 12 comes from the book of 2 John, and its theme is "Walk in Love." We will discuss the elder, the lady, and her children. Lesson 13 comes from the shortest book of the Bible, 3 John. We will go verse-by-verse through this "postcard" of a book to learn the joy of walking in truth and the joy believers have when they walk in truth together in unity and love.

These next three months can be a fruitful period of spiritual growth for you and your students. Although winter can be a difficult time for many, these Bible studies are written to help you learn, grow, and teach well.

Remember to keep the students interested and engaged by utilizing the application points and asking questions. The Daily Bible Readings in each lesson will help you and your students abide in God's Word. All these studies of the inspired Word of God should deepen your class's appreciation for God's love.

PLEASE NOTE: Fundamental, sound doctrine is the objective of LifeStone Ministries, Union Gospel Press. The writers are prayerfully selected for their Bible knowledge and willingness to submit to the Spirit of Truth, each writing in his own style as enlightened by the Holy Spirit. At best we know in part only. "They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Teaching Teenagers to Keep Christmas Focused on Christ

Have you ever considered how difficult it is to keep Christ at the center of Christmas? It is strange that we must work hard at this task, considering the first six letters of Christmas are “Christ”! But a busy life, secular culture, and extra holiday events can distract us from celebrating the birth of our Savior this Christmas!

As a teacher of older teenagers, you have opportunities to make a difference and get honest feedback from them. Past attempts to make Christmas extra special may have failed because of a lack of planning. You are in a unique position because you teach students the Bible each week.

This article will share tips and ideas to help teens, families, and friends stay focused on Christ this Christmas season.

Plan *before* December 1. Once the season starts, it can be exceedingly difficult to slow down. Before the month begins, make a simple plan to help you stay focused on Christ. You have an advantage if your group meets in the same place each week. You can do a countdown to Christmas, decorate the room, and do other creative, Christ-centered activities.

Lesson 1 is on December 6, so hopefully, you are reading this for the first time before class begins. (We recommend you prepare early for every Bible study.) But even if you get a late start, you can still accomplish some meaningful things this Christmas season. Here are a few tips: utilize twenty-five daily Bible readings about Christ, use an Advent guide or calendar, and keep it simple and attainable.

Encourage extra participation from the students in any of the church's Christmas activities. Although your church may be doing things, the teenagers may not be very involved. This is a wonderful time to help them step up and participate and make some meaningful relationships as they serve alongside adults in their church.

If your class is combined with students of various ages and grade levels, you can do something nice for another class of small children or older adults. One example is to throw a birthday party for Jesus. That can be exciting because you can blend birthday and Christmas elements into one event.

Your class can also plan an evening to view local Christmas light displays, which can be found through online searches and social media. Teenagers are excellent researchers about things going on in the community. Here are two ideas to keep it Christ-centered: discuss the symbolism of light in Christianity. (Perhaps read John 1:1-18 together.) You can also sing carols at each stop.

Encourage your students to read through the four Gospels during Christmas. These perspectives on Jesus' life will help your class stay focused on Him.

Encourage students to add one Christ-focused event in their personal schedules this year. Some Christ-focused events can be found through your church or the churches in your community. These personal choices will help make Christ the center of the Christmas season in your life.

What about bringing Christ's light to a secular event? People who do not have

Christ in their hearts are not celebrating His birth. But there are many holiday events to which you can bring Christ. For example, at a community Christmas tree lighting, ask if you can help by including traditional Christmas carols or reading the Christmas story. You can shine the light of Christ wherever you go, without needing to dominate the event.

Send out Christ-centered Christmas cards this year. You may have some artistic students in your class who might be interested in creating handmade Christmas cards. You can make and distribute cards to veterans, people in hospitals, or those in prison. Include messages of hope and God's love inside the cards.

Many people have slowly ended the tradition of sending cards, but you can send beautifully adorned cards to friends and family. They may display your card at home to help them remember the holiday. You do not have to include a long gospel tract. A nice card with a manger scene and Bible verse would be great.

If you do not have the time or money, you can use your phone to send messages and post them on social media. Christmas Day is a great day to text people individually and wish them a Merry Christmas. Social media can reach many people with images, videos, and Bible passages about Christmas.

Your group of teenagers may make wonderful carolers. Organize caroling sessions around neighborhoods, nursing homes, or hospitals, though be careful about dragging sullen teens to events they will resent. Singing traditional Christmas carols can bring joy and remind people of Christ's birth.

A living nativity or interactive Christmas story experience can be a meaningful event that does not cost too much money. Visitors can experience scenes from the Christmas story in different stations (the announcement to Mary, the journey to Jerusalem, the manger scene, and so forth). Volunteers can explain the significance of each station. If you only

have a few people, you can focus on the manger scene. This is just one example of something you can offer to your community.

You can organize or partner with a group that is conducting a food drive or meal delivery. Your group can collect nonperishable food items to donate to local food banks or shelters. Alternatively, you can prepare and deliver meals to families in need or to the elderly who might be spending Christmas alone.

The teens in your class may be interested in a free gift-wrapping service. Set up a booth at a shopping center or local store where you offer this service. Use this opportunity to share a brief message about the gift of Jesus, perhaps with a small card or flyer.

Hosting a "parent's night out" during Christmas may help some adults with final Christmas shopping and tasks. People are terribly busy, but if your youth can watch the kids for a couple of hours, it will be a blessing to the parents, especially single parents. Your teens can also do some Christ-centered crafts and projects with the kids.

One final idea for the class is to adopt a grandparent or bless a family headed by a single parent for Christmas. You can match youth group members with others to do some Christmas activities together. Students can make or buy gifts and make cookies or help decorate a tree. Start with your congregation, then reach out to other groups.

If you want to keep Christmas focused on Christ in your home, pray about it. Tell the Lord the things on your heart, and ask Him for help.

Talk to your family. Everyone in your home should know that this is one of your missions this year. See what ideas they have for keeping the focus on Christ this Christmas. You can start or return to some meaningful Christmas traditions with a little discussion and planning.

Merry Christmas! May the Lord bless you in your efforts to keep Him first.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

LAM. 3:1 I *am* the man *that* hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.

2 He hath led me, and brought me *into* darkness, but not *into* light.

3 Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand *against me* all the day.

19 Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

20 My soul hath *them* still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

21 This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.

22 *It is of* the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 *They are new every morning:* great *is thy* faithfulness.

24 The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

25 The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him.

26 *It is* good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD .

27 *It is* good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.

28 He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne *it* upon him.

29 He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.

30 He giveth *his* cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach.

31 For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

32 But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

33 For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

34 To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,

35 To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High,

36 To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.

37 Who *is* he *that* saith, and it cometh to pass, *when* the Lord commandeth *it* not?

38 Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good?

39 Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

NOTES

The Lord's Compassion

Lesson Text: Lamentations 3:1-3, 19-39

Related Scriptures: Psalm 130:1-8; Lamentations 3:4-18, 40-66;
2 Corinthians 4:7-12; Hebrews 12:4-11

TIME: about 585 BC

PLACE: Jerusalem or Egypt

GOLDEN TEXT—"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Studying the Text

This is the beginning of a new quarter of study! The winter quarter will focus on the love of God. "Love Sends a Savior" is the topic of unit 1 (the first four lessons). After that, we will look at "Jesus' Love for the World" for three weeks, and we will conclude by looking at "Living Out God's Love."

Studying God's love and His sending the Savior is a wonderful way to experience the Christmas season. This first lesson is taken from the book of Lamentations. The presumed writer was the prophet Jeremiah. It was written shortly after (and because of) the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. We do not always think of God's love during tragedy, but He loves us and is present even in our worst times.

THE DEPRESSING REALITY— Lam. 3:1-3

This chapter is an acrostic poem using the Hebrew alphabet. The first three verses begin with the first Hebrew letter, *aleph*. The next three verses begin with the second letter, *bet*, and so on. Many songs, poems, and works of art are gut-wrenching expressions of a person's feelings. That is what we read in Lamentations.

Jeremiah spent years preaching to the people of Judah about God's judgment. Centuries after Joshua led God's people to victory in Canaan, Jeremiah and the people of Judah saw Babylon destroy Jerusalem, their nation, and even Solomon's temple.

The verses that begin this chapter reveal the raw heart of a grieving individual. We read the author acknowledging the reality of someone who has lived through war. In verse 1, we read how personal this poem was to the writer with the words "I am the man."

Jeremiah identified with suffering and acknowledged God's discipline. He was experiencing great grief and knew it came from God. In Psalm 23, we read of the Great Shepherd's rod (weapon) and staff (walking stick with a crook) bringing comfort. But in Lamentations 3, we see the Lord's rod of wrath being used against the people who betrayed God.

In verse 2, he continued describing what the Lord had done. Instead of praising God for leading him to blessings, he said that God had led him into darkness. That is difficult to read when so many other Scriptures describe God leading His people into the light

by guiding each step. Jeremiah knew God was punishing His people. He felt abandoned, but also recognized God's sovereignty in adversity. He used the great contrast of darkness and light to describe what God had done.

Not only was Jeremiah speaking of his emotional state of inner darkness, but he may also have been describing his physical location. In Jeremiah 43, we read that he was taken from Judah to Egypt. While in Egypt, he preached against their wickedness and prophesied concerning the upcoming military takeover. Babylon was going to attack Egypt too. The place God had plagued with darkness in Exodus 10 would experience the darkness of military conquest.

In another contrast of light and darkness, in Jeremiah 43:13, we read that God would destroy the images of Beth-shemesh and burn the temples of the false gods in Egypt. Beth-shemesh refers to the temple of the sun god in ancient Egypt, where great obelisks were dedicated to the sun god. Even though Jeremiah was forced to relocate to an Egyptian city whose inhabitants worshipped the sun, he knew that God had brought him into a land of spiritual darkness.

In Lamentations 3:3, the author wrote that God had turned against him. More specifically, he said the Lord had turned His hand against him all day long. God was intense and relentless as he dealt with Jeremiah. Throughout Scripture, we see the hand of God doing great things for His people. We have also read of God's mighty hand performing miracles that can only be explained as divine. But Jeremiah described God's hand that chastises and delivers punishment.

The excruciating description of punishment continues for seventeen more verses. Jeremiah was not being overly dramatic! He was utterly devastated at the loss of everything: his people,

Jerusalem, the temple, everything was destroyed. Thankfully, the story did not end there. There was a turning point in Jeremiah's thinking that leads to hope!

THE POWER OF REMEMBERING— Lam. 3:19-21

The writer shared three lines about remembering the bad, the results of remembrance, and how recollection can bring hope. In this section of the acrostic poem, those three verses begin with the Hebrew letter *zayin*.

Remember the hard times (Lam. 3:19). After a lengthy description of all the things God had done to him, Jeremiah said he remembered his affliction and misery. His words refer to suffering, poverty, trouble, grief, straying, and wandering.

He compared his trouble to wormwood and gall, things that taste disgusting and can cause great harm. The root of the wormwood plant is poisonous.

Many animals have gallbladders. They store and concentrate bile, a greenish-brown liquid used to digest food. Bile, or gall, is very gross and not to be eaten, but it serves a purpose. Jeremiah's past and present suffering was difficult, but it served a purpose.

The soul remembers (Lam. 3:20). We know what it is like to remember something in our minds, but to hold a memory in our souls is different. Jeremiah wrote that deep down inside, in the seat of his emotions and desires, he remembered how awful God's punishment had been. He did not complain. He said this remembrance humbled him.

Remembering who God is brings hope (Lam. 3:21). As Jeremiah recalled these things, he also remembered God's unchanging qualities. This purposeful remembrance brought him hope! This was a pivotal moment of remembering God's faithfulness and compassion.

GOD'S MERCIES—Lam. 3:22-24

Verses 22 and 23 are the golden text for our lesson. They are powerful and should be memorized.

Verses 22-24 begin with the Hebrew letter *heth*. In verse 22, we read that Jeremiah relied on the Lord's mercies.

Jeremiah did not just use a generic word for God; he used God's proper name. *Yahweh* is the name of the one true God of the universe. This name of God is used over sixty-five-hundred times in the Bible to refer to the covenant-keeping, mighty God of the Israelites. Often His formal name is usually translated in the English Bible like it is here: the LORD.

The Hebrew word translated here as "mercies" is *hesed*. That word refers to God's unfailing, loyal, devoted, great love. It describes steadfast love based on a close relationship, kindness, and faithfulness.

Because of God's mercies, Jeremiah and those to whom he preached were still alive. They had not been consumed. The Lord's great love kept them alive. Verse 22 continues by describing the nature of God's compassions—they never fail! Compassion is more than pity. Compassion is when someone is deeply *moved* and act. The Lord's mercy never ends and always accomplishes good for His people.

Verse 23 is the second verse of this week's golden text. It says that the Lord's mercies are new every morning. Since God has all power, He can keep producing more and more mercies. Yesterday may have been horrible, but God has new mercies this morning.

The verse ends with a powerful statement: "Great is thy faithfulness." This phrase is popular in poems and hymns. Of all the words Jeremiah could choose to describe Yahweh's faithfulness, he said it is great because God is great!

In verse 24, we read the phrase "The Lord is my portion." Jeremiah was the

son of a priest. This is interesting because when the Lord directed the dividing of the Promised Land, He said the Levitical priests would not receive a portion. God Himself would be their portion (Num. 18:20). This became a beautiful symbol of God's servants not depending on houses or land as sources of pride or security. The Lord was their portion. Jeremiah said he would hope in the Lord.

CONTENT LIVING—Lam. 3:25-33

After the powerful pivot to hope in verses 22-24, the poem instructs those living in hope. Verses 25-27 begin with the Hebrew letter *teth*. Each verse also contains the word "good."

Verse 25 says the Lord is good to those who wait for and hope in Him. God is pleasing to the soul that seeks Him. Our benevolent God knows who is waiting on and seeking Him. What is His response? He is good to that person. Encourage your class to wait on God, acknowledging His goodness.

The following two verses continue the use of the word "good" by pointing out that it is good that a man should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord (vs. 26). We wait for God to answer our prayers and deliver us in His time.

Verse 27 says it is good for a man to "bear the yoke in his youth." A yoke connected work animals to a large tool like a plow. Here the author reflected on the good that can come from very difficult circumstances: a person can learn and grow. Bearing the yoke is a way to describe uncomfortable training and direction. Jeremiah saw value in learning lessons while one is young.

Verses 28-30 begin with the letter *yodh* and show the actions of person who has been humbled by the hand of God: sit, put, and give. Verse 28 conveys that the afflicted man should sit alone in silence because God has laid it on him. This is a person submitting to God's discipline.

Someone putting his face in the dust sounds strange, but the Bible describes the custom of lying prostrate before a king as an act of total surrender. Even in an act of vulnerable humility, verse 29 says there is hope. Why? Because God restores the humble (cf. Isa. 57:15).

Lamentations 3:30 continues the theme of enduring suffering with patience. As we read of someone who willingly turns the other cheek when punched or slapped, we see a foreshadowing of Jesus. He taught it (Matt. 5:39) and lived it (26:67-68).

Lamentations 3:31-33 begins with the Hebrew letter *kaph*. It highlights the compassion of God. Note the use of the word “mercies” again. During times of suffering, God is still compassionate. How? Verse 31 states that judgment is temporary. Verse 32 gives us the new term “the multitude of his mercies.” Verse 33 states that He does not punish willingly or from His heart. He disciplines us when we are disobedient. God’s discipline comes from love, not spite or hatred. The goal is for us to repent and for God to restore our relationship with Him.

GOD’S JUSTICE—Lam. 3:34-39

Verses 34-36 are one long sentence, each phrase beginning with the Hebrew letter *lamedh*. God does not approve of injustice, cruelty, or oppression. He does not condone the harsh treatment of captives or prisoners (vs. 34). God is fair and created all people in His image. Since each person is an image bearer, each person has rights and dignity (vs. 35). God knows when someone is denied justice and disapproves of that (vs. 36).

The final three verses in today’s lesson (vss. 37-39) are three questions that begin with the Hebrew letter *mem*. They remind the reader that God alone is sovereign (vs. 37). God does only what is good and can never do

something that is evil. He is just and righteous, yet both good and bad circumstances can come from Him (vs. 38). Our response to His judgment is submission and repentance (vs. 39).

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

M — How Long, O Lord? Ps. 13:1-6.
T — Jeremiah’s Affliction. Lam. 3:4-18.
W — The Lord’s Judgment. Lam. 3:40-66.
T — Afflicted but Not Crushed. 2 Cor. 4:7-10.
F — Out of the Depths I Cry. Ps. 130:1-8.
S — The Lord’s Love. Ps. 36:1-12.
S — Steadfast Love in Affliction. Lam. 3:1-3, 19-39.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How did Jeremiah describe his experience of God’s discipline in Lamentations 3:1-3?
2. Why is the transition from despair to hope in verses 19-24 significant?
3. To whom is the Lord good?
4. In times of suffering, how does the Lord show mercy?
5. Explain God’s view of human injustice.

REAL-LIFE APPLICATIONS

When life seems dark, or when you feel God’s discipline, it is essential to remember that God has not given up on you. Discipline means He loves you enough to help you grow.

Depression is a big deal. When a believer is suffering from depression, it may feel like God is absent and silent. Many times, it is difficult to ask for prayer when you are depressed. Yet

remind your class that other people might not realize they need prayer and encouragement unless they ask.

Being a believer does not eliminate all problems in life. This shocks some new Christians, who assume the Lord will give them a pain-free life. It is essential to help our new brothers and sisters as they experience afflictions. Offer encouragement and prayer.

Hope is key when going through difficult days. Remembering God's faithfulness in past trials helps us persevere. The Lord is amazing and worthy to be worshipped, even on our worst days. Listing answered prayers and writing examples of God's faithfulness in your life can help give you strength to wait and remind you to trust the Lord.

Suffering can lead to introspection and spiritual growth. When we go through difficult seasons of life, reflecting on what God is doing is important. After going through hardship, make a habit of stopping and thinking about what God did for you, and examine how you acted and reacted. The difficult times will come. We should take time to grow spiritually from them.

TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is for your students to learn and expect the Lord's compassion in the midst of suffering.

Planning Your Presentation

Starting a new quarter is exciting. Take extra time to prepare this first lesson. Share your excitement with the students and their parents. Encourage all the students to come to class each week to learn about the love of God. Encourage them to develop the habit of using the Daily Bible Readings that

are provided to reflect on God's love throughout the week.

Teaching a long passage with a heavy topic can be challenging. Be honest about this as you teach. Since you are teaching older teens, tell them that you respect them and know that they can relate to depression and pain. Also, share with them the hope we have in God's faithfulness.

You have experienced troubles in life. Share an experience to which they might relate. Spend a few minutes telling them about the situation and how it felt. Also describe the faithfulness of God in that situation.

This study aims to help teenagers understand that God's compassion and mercy are ever-present even in the darkest times, encouraging a deeper faith and reliance on Him amid trials.

Visual Aid

Sketch a pot that once was broken but pieced back together with unseen hands, symbolizing God's work in mending our lives. Include small rays of light shining all around. Print "RESTORATION" above. Through our brokenness, God's compassion shines. This represents the process of healing and restoration through suffering.

