

Reaching Out to Godⁱ

Praise:

Begin to prepare your heart and mind for the study by listening to and/or singing the worship songs from the services. Choose at least three songs from the following list:

Open Up Our Eyes – Elevation Worship

Lay Me Down – One Sonic Society

Our God – Chris Tomlin

10,000 Reasons – Matt Redman

Cornerstone – Hillsong United

Let the Praises Ring – Lincoln Brewster

Let It Rise – Big Daddy Weave

All Because of the Cross – Paul Baloche

Your Blood Ran Down – Paul Baloche

You Loved My Heart to Death – Shane and Shane

Prayer:

Following the praise music, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

Preparation:

(5-10 min)

1. Ask each person to write on a piece of paper three sentences that describe or summarize the message, “Reaching Out to God.”
2. Have each person read aloud his/her summary. After all have presented, discuss the descriptions/summaries for the remaining few minutes (of the 10 total).

Reviewing the Scriptural Basis:

(5 min)

Read aloud the following scripture. Take a moment to reflect on the verses and what they mean for you.

Psalm 119:169 (GNT)

Let my cry for help reach you, Lord! Give me understanding, as you have promised.

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely [reach out to] him.

Breaking it Down

(30 min)

Break into smaller groups of three or four people. Read the key segments of today’s message, and answer together the questions related thereto.

The Healing Power of Christ

In the first lesson of this series, we learned that the first step in receiving the healing power of Christ is to recognize our need. This means admitting that we have hurts, hang-ups and habits to which we are *powerless* and for which we *need* God’s intervention. Matthew comforts us when he wrote, “God blesses those who...realize their need for him” (5:3 NLT). But, that realization alone doesn’t bring a remedy to our problems. It’s not enough to recognize the need we have for God to intervene in our lives; we have to reach out to Him in order to receive what He has to offer.

To receive the help that only the Lord can provide, we must do three things...

1. Acknowledge God's Existence

The Bible asserts this truth in plain language: "Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him" (Hebrews 11:6 NLT). One commentary¹ aptly describes this concept in the following way:

[B]elief in God's existence has no practical value unless it moves the believer to an active faith toward God. God exists in vain...until active faith in Him begins to function.

When we believe that God exists (truth), we've taken another step in preparing ourselves to receive the healing power of Christ, and ultimately—throughout these lessons—we'll learn to put our faith into action.

1. What might be some of the difficulties for people to believe in God's existence?
2. How did you come to know that God exists?
3. Describe a time that your faith was challenged and how you recovered (if recovered).

2. Appreciate God's Character

"12-step programs" provide a set of guidelines and course of action for recovery. Step 2, for example, requires participants to believe that a "greater power" (other than themselves) can restore sanity. Furthermore, each participant gets to define his/her "higher power" in these recovery programs. That's a fairly common approach in our pluralistic society. We might hear comments such as, "I believe God is like...," or "My idea of God is...." Just because we have a certain understanding about God doesn't make it the "right" understanding.

"Until we understand God's true character, we can't completely trust Him" (p. 44). As humans, we learn from experience; accordingly, it's fair to say that we tend to use our experiences as a means of predicting or anticipating outcomes in various circumstances or relationships. But, when we try to apply our human relationships/experiences to understanding God's character, we end up with a flawed or false understanding of who God is. So, to find out the truth of who God is, we should seek the counsel of the One who said He is the Truth—Jesus Christ.

1. What do you believe about God?
2. What kind of God do you believe Him to be?
3. Where and how did you get your ideas about Him?

From Jesus, we learn some important truths about God and His relationship with us. From Jesus, we learn....

a. God knows about our situation.

"God knows your hurts, hang-ups, and habits. He knows the good and bad.... He knows it all. And He cares. Nothing escapes His notice" (p. 45). That could feel a little scary to a lot of us...to think He knows the secrets we're hiding? But *no one* knows the shame/guilt I carry about certain choices I've made (or didn't make); *no one* understands what I've been through—rape, divorce, abortion, addiction, betrayal, pornography.... But God does. He is aware of everything that's going

¹ *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary: Volume VI*, p. 145. © 1979 by the Editorial Board of *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*. Charles W. Carter, Chairman and General Editor. Reprinted 1986 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

on in our lives, and He's not shocked by any of it. "God is not shocked by your sin. He knew it was coming long before you did" (p. 46). We hold onto our hurts, hang-ups, and habits partly because if we dared "expose" them to someone, we couldn't bear to hear the voice of condemnation or shocking disbelief, "You did WHAT?!?" That's something we never have to worry about with God. Really. And that's a demonstration of God's character: love...unconditional love.

1. Describe a time when you felt truly alone in your circumstance.
2. When and how have you experienced God's love, even when you felt unlovable?

b. God cares about our situation.

Not only does God know about our situation, but He *cares* about it, too. His love for us is immeasurable, and He shows us just how much He cares about us: "You know how troubled I am. *You have kept a record of my tears*" Psalm 56:8 (GNT, emphasis added). A record of our tears! God knows every tear we've shared—what a remarkable demonstration of the depth of His caring about us that He keeps a count of our tears! But, the most extraordinary example God has given us to show His care for us is in the sacrifice of His own Son: "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us" (John 15:13 NIV).

It's one thing to know about someone's situation, but it's another thing to *care*. We've seen in the scripture passages above that God certainly cares about our situation, so it is natural to expect Him to act on our behalf, as well. The Bible explains it this way, "The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are..." (Psalm 103:13-14a NLT). As a loving father, God doesn't spare us the consequences of foolish choices; in fact, He oftentimes allows pain to get our attention. He doesn't CAUSE the pain, and He doesn't enjoy seeing us in pain. However, our heavenly Father will allow us to experience pain in order to alert us that something is wrong. God will use painful experiences to let us know we need help:

Pain alerts us to our need for help. [It] is often a consequence of our poor choices or the poor choices of others. God allows the natural consequences of these poor choices to play out. [He] loves us and wants to lead us out of our pain and into His healing. (p. 40)

While God doesn't necessarily appreciate the four-letter words that come out of our mouths, we can be sure there's one He does want to hear us say: H-E-L-P. God wants us to give Him our call out to Him...to give Him our attention when we allow our hurts, hang-ups, and habits to define us. To deny Him our attention is to refuse His care and His power to heal our hurts, hang-ups, or habits. So, what does our loving Father do to get our attention? John Bakerⁱⁱ describes three methods that God uses to get our attention: crisis, confrontation, and catastrophe. Whether God is stretching out His arms in tenderness or allowing us to suffer the painful consequences of poor choices (ours or another's), it is simply because He cares.

1. Describe a time when someone demonstrated how much s/he cared about your situation.
2. How do you feel about God's allowing us to suffer painful consequences of our choices?
3. What crisis, confrontation, or catastrophe has God used to get your attention?

c. God can change our situation.

In the movie, "Facing the Giants," Coach Grant Taylor sets the scene for the movie with the mantra, "With God, nothing is impossible." God can and will change our situation when we choose to let Him. He has immeasurable and unlimited power at His disposal, and He can change our

situation. “Sometimes God changes you; sometimes He changes your situation. Sometimes He changes both. He’s got the power” (p. 47).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays for us to understand “the incredible greatness of God’s power...the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead...” (1:19-20 NLT). Paul is asserting that if God can raise Jesus from the dead—which He did!—then He can certainly resurrect our dead relationships, release us from our hurts, hang-ups, and habits, and remove the fear associated with any of those. If it seems impossible to change your situation, know this: “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27 NIV). “Be strong and courageous,...for there is a power far greater on our side!” (2Chronicles 32:7 NLT), and “He is mighty in both power and understanding” (Job 36:5b NLT). God CAN change our situation when we choose to let Him.

1. Share a situation that you’ve thought (or still think) to be impossible to change.
2. Where have you experienced the “greatness of God’s power” in your life?
3. How do you feel about change? What situation needs changing in your life?

3. Accept God’s Power

Consider the means of function for most devices: a power source, right? Typically something has to be plugged in to a power source in order for it to work (battery and solar power excluded). Applying the same premise to people, we conclude that we must be “plugged in” to a power source (God’s power) in order to receive H-E-L-P and healing for our hurts, hang-ups, and habits.

When we’re plugged in to His power, God supplies us with all we need...
Power, love, and self-control—God’s triple power surge, the very three things we need in order to be healthy, happy, and whole (p. 48).

The Apostle Paul affirms this “triple power surge” principle in 2 Timothy 1:7 (GNT): “The Spirit that God has given us...fills us with power, love, and self-control.” These gifts from the Holy Spirit should inspire us to reach out to God... acknowledging His existence, appreciating His character, and accepting His power.

1. How have you experienced God’s power when you faced a tough situation?
2. Describe a time where you experienced God’s love when you were hurting?
3. When have you experienced “God-control” when you felt life spinning out of control?
4. What is a hurt, hang-up, or habit you are facing that needs God’s power to overcome?

In Closing:

In the Book of Acts 4:12 (NCV), Peter said, “Jesus is the only One who can save people. No one else in the world is able to save us.” Reaching out to God requires that we step outside ourselves, that we put aside our pride or fear; it could mean letting go and making changes. It means uncharted territory for most of us. But, we know from Romans 10:13 (NLT), “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Trust Him. Believe in His existence, appreciate His character, and accept His power.

Close in Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for loving me and caring for me in spite of myself. I confess that I have failed to trust You by refusing to ask You for help, for thinking I can control my life, and for denying the call to reach out to you. For these choices I am sorry. I realize I need Your power to break my hurts, hang-ups, and habits that keep me from living the kind of life You want me to live. So, right now...I am reaching out to you, Lord. Hear me. Help me. Heal me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Blessing (say this as a group):

“Anyone who wants to [reach out to] God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.” Hebrews 11:6 (MSG)

Action Items for the Week Ahead:

Review the key points of today’s message and the scriptures related thereto. In the week ahead, reflect upon those scriptures, and consider the following:

1. **PRAY** about it: Is there a change in your life that needs to be made that you’re afraid of or unwilling to change? Ask God to make you willing to be willing to change.
2. **WRITE** about it: Describe what you believe about God, list some pain that God is using to speak into your life, and tell God about any hurts, hang-ups, or habits that you are reluctant to turn over to His care.
3. **SHARE** about it: Tell your small group or a person you trust what God is doing in your life and how He is speaking to you.

ⁱThis sermon series, “The Healing Power of Christ,” is based on the book, *Life’s Healing Choices*, by John Baker. ©2007 by Richard D. Warren and John E. Baker. All quotes used in this discussion guide are taken from this book and annotated accordingly.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 42.