



ECHOES

Adult Teacher's Commentary



The Righteous Reign of God

Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah,
Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians

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*This lesson is designed to help you evangelize unsaved students (see also page 114).

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Vol. 35, No. 4

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



**Patricia
Merritt**



**Daphne
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**Crystal
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**Roslyn
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**David
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This quarter's lessons contain one of my all-time, absolute favorite Bible verses: "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17, KJV).

I'll never forget the day I first heard this verse. I sat quietly in a meeting with about a half dozen leaders reporting their week. One of the men began to share how this verse in Zephaniah had ministered to him. He talked about his discouragement, regret, anger, and shame. He almost choked up as he spoke of his heaviness of negativity being lifted and melting away as he meditated on God's words.

As he read the verse aloud again, the Lord began to minister to me too, especially the prophet saying the Lord delights over us with singing. How much of my Christian life have I pictured God annoyed or irritated with me? He seemed anxious to pass out my consequences for being too mouthy and for my poor decisions.

After that leader meeting, I continued to study this verse further. I discovered the word "rejoice" means "To dance, skip, and leap around in joy, to spin under the influence of violent emotion." This goes beyond my wildest imagination—the Father extremely happy over me!

I wish someone had explained this verse to me early in my Christian experience. How disappointed I'd be if my six-year-old grandson, Ian, came to my house each time and said, "Granny, what did I do wrong the last time I was here? Tell me what I need to do today so I don't mess up again." No way. I want little Ian to enjoy his time with me. I want him to relax, laugh, and look forward to his visits.

In the same way, I believe God wants His children to enjoy being in His presence—how about a little laughter? How about feeling relaxed in the throne room? I'm not saying sin, judgment, or disobedient consequences are not in the Bible. It's there. But that's not the entire Book.

Just give the verse some thought before you think I've gotten a hold of some bad theology or been spending too much time in some spiritual "La La Land." While you are analyzing my belief system, I'll keep enjoying the thought of God singing over me. And I'll keep enjoying Him like a carefree little child.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victoria L. McAfee".

Victoria McAfee, Contributing Editor

Your Teaching Materials

adult curriculum publications

These quarterly resources enable you to coordinate a complete learning experience for your students.



Adult Teacher's Commentary: step-by-step instructions to help you prepare for and teach each lesson with Bible background material and activities relating Bible truths to your students' lives.



Adult Teacher's Resource Kit: a packet containing an *Adult Teacher's Commentary* and teaching aids including full-color Bible background posters, worksheets, and other discussion starters to be used with the teacher's commentary.



Comprehensive Bible Study: an adult-level student booklet providing students with information about and application of a portion of Scripture. **In Regular or Large Print.**



Lesson Leaflet: a condensed version of *Comprehensive Bible Study* to give to visitors or use as an outreach tool.



The Quiet Hour: daily devotionals coordinated with the Daily Bible Readings listed in *Comprehensive Bible Study*.



Power for Living: an adult take-home paper profiling dynamic Christians, along with other helpful articles.



Real Life Downloaded: combines current news stories with your weekly Bible lessons. See more on p. 8. Take a test drive today and download your FREE copy at: Reallifedownloaded.com

Basic Classroom Supplies

You may need the following supplies for this quarter's lessons:

- Bibles—several versions (or online access)
- Paper/pencils/colored markers
- Thumbtacks
- Pointer
- Whiteboard, overhead, or newsprint, and markers
- Media player
- Cellophane tape
- Masking tape
- Index cards
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Hymnals or chorus books

FREE!



Online Is
Where It's @!



Step-by-Step through the Lesson

As Easy as 1, 2, 3, 4!

1

Step 1: Life Need

Most adults show up on Sunday focused more on where the mortgage money will come from and how they can recapture their relationship with their teen than on learning something new from the Bible. This step will help adults focus on today's challenge. Don't skip this step! It's not fluff or foolishness. It's the step that gets adults ready to discover why this Bible study is important to them. At the end of these few minutes, they are ready to participate—and today's lesson just might contain the answers to life questions they brought with them to class.

2

Step 2: Bible Learning

Lively Bible study! That's what happens here. As adults study the Bible and discuss what they found, they gain a growing understanding of how to move forward on their discipleship journey.

Spend lots of time preparing Step 2. In class, you can discuss the passage, read the Scriptures, and conduct both deductive and inductive Bible study. Adults should never think the Bible section is the duller part of the lesson. Bring it alive with your expression, actions, and most of all, your own attitude! Each week, you'll challenge adults to prepare for next week's lesson. Their preparation isn't long or difficult, but it does encourage participation. When adults have invested something of themselves in the lesson, they will get more out of it.

3

Step 3: Bible Application

Practice time—a time to turn the classroom into a laboratory. You'll discover how deeply your adults are personally involved with what the Bible teaches. This guide will give you three choices every week. Use all three. Or, if you have a small class, pick one. Activities will be different each week: a role-play, creative activity, discussion, case study, interviews—lots of adult-level interaction.

4

Step 4: Life Response

Okay! You helped your adults become focused on the topic (Step 1). Then you guided them into the Bible study (Step 2). They practiced what they learned (Step 3). Now students will decide what they will actually do with what they've learned. This part of the lesson is not safe! Living the Christian life can be challenging, but it is always exciting.

Each adult will decide for himself or herself how to live for Jesus this week. You can encourage people, but ultimately they need to personally own their decisions. They are living for Jesus because they choose to, not because of outside pressure you put on them.

Don't have a single doubt about it! The biggest part of your Sunday school lesson doesn't happen in your classroom. It happens on Monday and Tuesday—and through the week—when instead of following their own desires or the crowd, they dare to say, "No, I will follow Jesus."

Natural Learning Cycle

You've just been around the Natural Learning Cycle. It's fun! It's simple! It's how we all learn—adults, teens, and children. First, we get interested in the subject (Step 1). Then we learn the facts from the Bible (Step 2). Next, we practice what we've learned (Step 3). Then, and most importantly, we use what we have learned during the week (Step 4). Then we come back to class next week and share how we lived the Christian life (Link to Last Week).

Highlights in Black History



Septima Poinsette Clark

Education and Civil Rights

by Victoria McAfee

Septima Poinsette Clark is called the grandmother or “Queen Mother” of the civil rights movement. As a teacher, she developed a literacy program that taught African Americans to read, write, and vote. She believed in the importance of self-improvement before institutional reforms.

Septima was born May 3, 1898, in Charleston, South Carolina. Her father, Peter Poinsette, was born into slavery. After being freed, he found a job working on a ship and traveled to Haiti. There he met his wife, Victoria. She was an America-born woman who’d been taken to Haiti by her brother at an early age. Victoria vowed never to be anyone’s slave or servant, so she ran her own laundering business out of her home. Clark’s parents were extremely committed to educating their children, even though Peter didn’t learn to write his name until adulthood.

Christian Beliefs—Clark’s Christian beliefs, desire to help others, and unwavering determination came from her parents. Her mother diligently involved herself in her church and made sure her children participated. According to Clark’s autobiography *Ready from Within*, “There are three things I felt I learned from my father. One was that he wanted you always to be truthful. Next, he wanted you not to exalt yourself


but to look at the culture of others and see whether or not you could strengthen their weakness...He talked about having Christ in your life. This is the one thing that helps you to understand people better. If you can get the spirit of Christ into your life, you will learn to see others as Christ saw them and be able to live with them and help them to live with themselves.”

Clark also recalled her conversion experience: “I went to church service where my brother works one Good Friday. They had a week of revival down there that night, and I felt a difference. I was thirteen years of age, so I became born again.... I’ve been working in the church all my life.” Over the years, she stood firm in her faith. She credited God for keeping her safe through all her dangerous challenges. She survived train, bus, and plane accidents, the Ku Klux Klan, threats of bombings, and an unjustified arrest.

“I’ll never know,” she said, “how a sheriff caught up with three white boys ... coming to bomb the house I slept in... while I lived in Monteagle, Tennessee. I said to myself, ‘God kept me that night, so I’ll put my body in His care each night after that, and I did.’ ”

Education and Career—Clark’s parents sent her to a local public school as a child, but when they saw the inadequacy of the overcrowded school, they sent her to the Avery Normal Institute, a private school for African Americans. She graduated in 1916, then took the teacher’s exam, but she could not teach in the Charleston public schools, which allowed no Black teachers.

So, after graduation, the 18-year-old Clark had her first teaching position at a Black school on Johns Island—a nine-hour boat ride from Charleston. Clark taught 132 students, with just one other teacher, in a one-room log cabin with no toilets. She made \$35 a week; she used \$8 of that to cover her living expenses, then sent the rest home to help her mother. She also held literacy classes for adults at night using ordinary materials such as the Sears catalog. The white teacher in the area made \$85 a week, had fewer students, and



had much better school facilities and supplies. It motivated Clark to work for equity and civil rights. Leaders of the NAACP occasionally came to Johns Island to hold meetings, and she became involved with the organization. Clark moved back to Charleston in 1919 to teach at Avery and she had her first civil rights victory—a petition to allow Black teachers in Charleston schools.

Marriage and Family—In 1923, she married Nerie Clark. He worked as a cook on a submarine in the navy during World War I. The couple lost their first child. She felt she had sinned against God and her mother (who opposed her marriage because her husband didn't live in South Carolina) by marrying Nerie. She eventually moved in with Nerie's parents in Hickory, North Carolina, where she attended an AME church. She felt they held "a more advanced idea of what being a Christian means than the more strict code under which I had been reared" in Charleston. The couple moved to Dayton, Ohio, where Nerie died in 1925. Clark thought about becoming a foreign missionary, but she now had another child, a 10-month-old baby boy. She decided not to leave him behind and go overseas. As a single Black mother, she struggled to take care of her son and had to look to relatives for help.

Fighting for Civil Rights—At that time, Clark moved to Columbia, South Carolina, to teach. On her summer breaks, she continued her education. In 1937, she studied under W.E.B. DuBois at Atlanta University. She obtained her B.A. in 1942 and her Master's four years later from Virginia's Hampton Institute.

Clark participated in filing a lawsuit with Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP fighting for equity in pay for Black and white teachers in Columbia. In 1956, South Carolina passed a statute forbidding city and state employees from belonging to civil rights organizations. Because of Clark's association with the NAACP and her refusal to resign from the organization, she lost her teaching job and her 40 years of teacher's pension.

Clark had already started conducting workshops for people at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, an interracial, educational center dedicated to social justice. She became the full-time director and taught adults the basics—how to read, how to fill out driver's license exams, voter registration forms, Sears mail-order forms, and how to sign checks. She also taught adults their rights and duties as American citizens and the steps to becoming a registered voter. Rosa Parks attended one of Clark's workshops months before refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a bus.

The state of Tennessee forced the closing of the Highlander school in 1961. But God opened the door for Clark to join the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), where she became one of the few women on the SCLC Executive Board. Clark's classes at Highlander eventually evolved into the Citizenship Schools project. With the help of the SCLC, the project trained over 10,000 teachers to start Citizenship Schools all over the South. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., supported her educational efforts since the schools helped their students learn not only to read and write but to fill out voter registration forms. Many Southern states would not allow anyone to vote who could not fill out a voting form. By 1969, over 100,000 adults had become voting citizens due to her 800 schools.

She retired from the SCLC in 1970 and moved back to Charleston, where she successfully petitioned to receive her back pay from the school system and became the first Black woman on the Charleston County School Board. In 1978, the College of Charleston awarded her an honorary doctorate. President Jimmy Carter recognized her sacrificial work and awarded her a Living Legacy Award in 1979. The SCLC gave her their highest award, Drum Major for Justice, for "her courageous and pioneering efforts in the area of citizenship education and interracial cooperation." Clark wrote two memoirs, *Echo in My Soul* and *Ready from Within*, before her death on December 15, 1987.

Resources for Deeper Bible Study

When you want to know more about the Scriptures

Beyond your **Adult Teacher's Commentary** are ample resources to give you the in-depth Bible study you want and need to help you and your students understand Scripture as fully as you can.

- For even more depth, [**The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New and Old Testaments**](#), by Dallas Theological Seminary professors John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, answers such questions as:

- What does this verse mean?
- What is the significance of this word or phrase in Hebrew?
- How can this alleged contradiction be explained?

The commentaries include for each Bible book an introduction (discussion of the author, historical background, purpose, features), outline, commentary, and bibliography, as well as easy-to-understand interpretations of the Scripture verses.



- Each week, [**Real Life Downloaded**](#) combines current news stories with your weekly Bible lessons. Online you will find a news story for Step 1 and discussion questions. Also online are links to music videos that relate to the focus of the lesson, and to videos of Bible places you will be studying in your lesson. *Real Life Downloaded* is available before you teach, so you will be able to plan your lessons ahead and set up any audio-visual equipment you need. **Check it out today at Reallifedownloaded.com**

- For every lesson, you will also find more commentary in the two-volume [**Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments**](#). You can study the Bible verse by verse with one of America's most beloved pastors, Dr. Warren Wiersbe, the former pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago and for 10 years the general director and Bible teacher for the *Back to the Bible* radio broadcast. Whether you are a pastor, teacher, or layperson, these commentaries allow you to study the Bible in easy-to-follow sections that emphasize personal application as well as biblical meaning. Developed from Dr. Wiersbe's best-selling *Be* series of Bible study books, these commentaries unpack all of God's Word in accessible, easy-to-read language. Each volume offers you Dr. Wiersbe's trustworthy insights on the Scriptures, introductions and outlines for each Bible book, and text that is free of academic jargon.

The Word of God admonishes us to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). This is the resource to help you do just that.



This selection from *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* can be used for background on Lesson 11 for Aug. 13.

Don't Judge Those You Disagree With (vss. 10-12)

How does the Christian prepare for the judgment seat of Christ? By making Jesus Lord of his life and faithfully obeying Him. Instead of judging other Christians, we had better judge our own lives and make sure we are ready to meet Christ at the *bema* (see Luke 12:41-48; Heb. 13:17; 1 John 2:28).

Two of the most famous Christians in Victorian England were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker, both of them mighty preachers of the Gospel. Early in their ministries they fellowshiped and even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement, and the reports even got into the newspapers. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater. Spurgeon smoked cigars, a practice many believers would condemn.

Who was right? Who was wrong? Perhaps *both* of them were wrong! When it comes to questionable matters in the Christian life, cannot dedicated believers disagree without being disagreeable? "I have learned that God blesses people I disagree with!" a friend of mine told me one day, and I have learned the same thing. When Jesus Christ is Lord, we permit Him to deal with His own servants as He wishes.

Christians Affect Each Other (vss. 13-15).

Note the possible ways we can affect each other. We can cause others to stumble, grieve others, or even destroy others. Paul was speaking of the way the strong Christian affected the weak Christian. Paul dealt with a similar problem in 1 Corinthians 8-9, where the question was, "Should Christians eat meat that has been offered to idols in heathen temples?" There he pointed out that knowledge and love must work together. "Knowledge puffs up while love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1). The strong Christian has spiritual knowledge, but if he does not practice love, his knowledge will hurt the weak Christian. Knowledge must be balanced by love.

Often little children are afraid of the dark and think there is something hiding in the closet. Of course, Mother knows that the child is safe, but her knowledge alone cannot assure or comfort the child. You can never argue a child into losing fear. When the mother sits at the bedside, talks lovingly to the child, and assures him that everything is secure, then the child can go to sleep without fear. Knowledge plus love helps the weak person grow strong.

"Nothing is unclean in itself" Paul wrote (Rom. 14:14). What something does to a person determines its quality. One man may be able to read certain books and not be bothered by them, while a weaker Christian reading the same books might be tempted to sin. But the issue is not, "How does it affect me?" so much as, "If I do this, how will it affect my brother?" Will it make him stumble? Will it grieve him or even de-

stroy him by encouraging him to sin? Is it really worth it to harm a brother just so I can enjoy some food? No! **Christians Must Have Priorities (vss. 16-18).**

Like the Pharisees, we Christians have a way of majoring on the minor things (Matt. 23:23-24). I have seen churches divided over matters that were really insignificant when compared with the vital things of the Christian faith. Some churches have split over such minor matters as the location of the piano in the auditorium and the serving of meals on Sundays.

Not the externals, but the eternals must be first in our lives: righteousness, peace, and joy. Where do they come from? The Holy Spirit of God at work in our lives (see Rom. 5:1-2). If each believer would yield to the Spirit and major in a godly life, we would not have Christians fighting with each other over minor matters. Spiritual priorities are essential to harmony in the church.

We Must Help Each Other Grow (vss. 19-21).

Both the strong believer and the weak believer need to grow. The strong believer needs to grow in love; the weak believer needs to grow in knowledge. So long as a brother is weak in the faith, we must lovingly deal with him in his immaturity. But if we really love him, we will help him to grow.

An illustration from the home might help us better understand what is involved. When a child comes into a home, everything has to change. Mother and Father are careful not to leave the scissors on the chair or anything dangerous within reach. But as the child matures, it is possible for the parents to adjust the rules of the house and deal with him in a more adult fashion. It is natural for a child to stumble when he is learning to walk. But if an adult constantly stumbles, we know something is wrong.

Young Christians need the kind of fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. But we cannot treat them like "babies" all their lives! The older Christians must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble. But the younger Christians must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). As they mature in the faith, they can help other believers to grow.

Don't Force Your Opinions on Others (vss. 22-23).

There are certain truths that all Christians must accept because they are the foundation for the faith. But areas of honest disagreement must not be made a test of fellowship. If you have a sincere conviction from God about a matter, keep it to yourself and do not try to force everybody else to accept it. No Christian can "borrow" another Christian's convictions and be honest in his Christian life. He must hold them and practice them "by faith."



Lesson Overview

Week of June 4

Suggested Material for As Your Students Arrive:

■ A bowl filled with clipped copies of news headlines

1 Life Need:

Identify areas of our lives where stress and chaos may challenge our faith.

2 Bible Learning:

Understand the comprehensive solution God promised for His people's defeat.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible sheet

—[The Power of God](#)

3 Bible Application:

Envision how God's promises to His people can encourage us in our situations.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible sheet—Pursuing Holiness

■ Index cards, paper, pens

4 Life Response:

Decide to respond in faith even when our circumstances seem hopeless.

Church/Home Theme:
God's Unfailing Love

Lesson Focus:
In times of stress and chaos, remember that God reigns.

Lesson Scripture:
Isaiah 52:7-12

God Reigns!

Good News! Good News!—In Isaiah 52, the prophet spoke uplifting messages to God's people and reminded the nation Who is in charge. No matter how upside-down our world is, God knows where it's going. He knows the end of the story.

Babylon—Isaiah specifically recorded predictions about the Babylonian conquest. The nation would suffer under Babylonian oppression for 70 years, but Isaiah predicted and assured the people that a remnant would return to their homeland, Jerusalem, to rebuild. Nahum used a similar prophetic message about the beauty of the feet of the messengers when God defeated Assyria, an enemy of the Jewish people (Nahum 1:15). Paul also referred to the Isaiah passage when commending those who share the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:14-15).

The Lord's Strength—Isaiah spoke of the Lord's arm, which symbolized His strength and power. God bared His arm, similar to a contemporary expression of one rolling up sleeves to begin a difficult job, or showing one's muscles to let an opponent know a victory over me will be no easy task. The Father demonstrated His might on behalf of His people and those in other nations.

The Return Home—The prophecy urged the future remnant to leave Babylon and return to their homeland, Jerusalem. Some of the Jewish captives who were born in this foreign territory would stay. The foreign country felt like home. But God described Babylon as an unclean place. Eventually, Babylon would be condemned, and His people needed to get out. They would take some of the sacred articles to Jerusalem that the Babylonians had stolen from the temple when they invaded the land. The Lord warned them to purify themselves, leave behind anything unclean, representing pagan Babylon.

Isaiah offered a final word of encouragement for God's people. Look to your heavenly Father now—He is your leader. The Lord cleared the path for the travelers to be protected, and He gave directions.

God Is Still on the Throne—The same God who guided the remnant safely back home from their captors still exists today. In times of tension, conflict, or confusion, our God is still on the throne, and He is still in charge.

As Your Students Arrive

Before class begins, hand around a bowl filled with clipped copies of news headlines. These can be taken from newspapers and magazines or printed from news sites on the Internet.

Choose a variety of stories, some positive, some negative, drawn from local, national, and international news. Ask students to choose one or two headlines to read to the class, then have each student comment on whether this headline is relevant to his or her life. What feelings does it raise? Would the student choose to read the whole article or ignore it?

Link to Last Week

Encourage a few students to share how they saw God's love shown to them this past week or ways they showed His love to others.

1 Life Need

Identify areas of our lives where stress and chaos may challenge our faith.

Comprehensive Bible Study Student Book Reduction

Lesson 1 • June 4 • Page 5

God Reigns

Adrian lowered the bullhorn and let out a long sigh. Then the room went back to the loud, fevered, and nervous-mixed-with-angry kind of a sound. Adrian's feet were tired. His head was throbbing, and he was hungry! He was 45 minutes away from his lunch break.

Some of the carnival riders, along with some of their family and friends were waiting in the large room. There had been a malfunction with the Octopus ride. An arm had come loose, throwing several people on the ground and jarring everyone else on the ride. Screams and shouts followed. Now, two hours later, the carnival company was still assessing the damage, talking to riders and getting their contact information.

From what Adrian understood there were no serious injuries, but many people were transported to the hospital for treatment and observation. Adrian, who had only been on the job for one month, immediately prayed for everyone's well-being once he learned about the accident.

He closed his eyes again, shutting out the noise and trying to block the stress of the day. "God, You are all powerful and sovereign," Adrian prayed. "Show Yourself strong. Please be with us during this unfortunate incident."

Adrian raised the bullhorn back to his mouth. "For those who would like lunch, it is being provided in the blue room. Please see a hostess for directions."

- 1. Describe how you felt in a situation where you faced great danger, hardship, or loss.**
- 2. Were you a Christian at the time? If so, how did your faith in God sustain you through that crisis?**
- 3. After walking with the Lord, do you trust Him more, or do you still think He might not be there for you when you need Him? Explain your answer.**

LESSON FOCUS: In times of stress and chaos, remember that God reigns.

Read the anecdote in the student book, then ask the students to form small groups to discuss their answers to **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

For Question 1, students might think of hard economic times when their family went through job loss and poverty; they might think of relational issues such as broken relationships; or they might bring up health scares. Encourage honest sharing of feelings they had at that time, including any uncertainties about God's care and involvement.

In Question 2, ask students to share both how their faith was strong enough to see them through that time, but also any ways that their faith wavered. Create a safe atmosphere to recognize that we are less than perfect, and mistakes and failures can help us grow. For students who were not Christians at the time they had a trying event, ask what their thoughts about God were at that time.

For Question 3, the desired answers show growth, not perfection. None of us has "arrived" in our faith; we are all still in process. Encourage all students—both those of strong faith and those whose faith is still uncertain—to consider what they have learned and how they have grown over the years. Suggest that they envision God walking with them through this growth process.

2 Bible Learning

Understand the comprehensive solution God promised for His people's defeat.



Before teaching this step, put up the [poster](#) “The Power of God” from the Resource Kit and make copies of the [handout](#) that goes with it. You will use it this week and for the next three lessons. On the poster

handout, read the first paragraph, and on the poster, point out the painting, “Sunrise over Jerusalem” by Edward Lear.

Awake to the Good News

Read Isaiah 52:7-10 and note the following points with your students:

- Isaiah said to welcome God’s messengers; they are bringing good news

BIBLE EXTRA

A Dramatic Turn

This passage comes after a long discussion of God’s deliverance and redemption of Jerusalem. From chapters 28 to 39, Isaiah prophesies that God will use the surrounding ancient nations to punish his people Israel with occupation and exile because of Israel’s disobedience and lack of commitment to the covenant.

The Book of Isaiah takes a dramatic turn in chapter 40, acknowledging that on the heels of desolation and judgment will come hope and restoration. Isaiah begins to comfort the listeners, reminding them of four core truths. First, the listeners are God’s people. Second, they have been forgiven, and the penalty for their sin has been paid. Third, God will bring them home, and in doing so reveal His glory. Finally, God’s Word stands forever, unchanging and unfading. This is the good news of peace and comfort which we find in Isaiah 52.

of peace, good tidings, salvation, and the reign of God.

- Those who watch for danger see God’s messengers coming and shout for joy.
- Jerusalem was in ruins, but God comforted and redeemed her, and she sings with joy.
- The whole world will see when God strongly saves His people.

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Awake to the Good News

Isaiah 52:7-10, KJV

⁷How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

⁸Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion.

⁹Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Isaiah 52:7-10, NIV

⁷How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

⁸Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the LORD returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes.

⁹Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.

¹⁰The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

At this point in Isaiah’s prophecy, Zion—Jerusalem—has taken quite a beating. Physical destruction is certainly coming, Isaiah warns, as a judgment against Israel’s rebellion and disregard for their covenant with God. This is not the first time Zion has taken a beating, either.

Isaiah presents Zion here many years in the future, after its fall, as a city in ruins. It is destroyed, with many of its



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on pp. 1190-1191 in [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament](#).

Suggested Answer to Question 4

The good news is that God continues to act out of love and care for His people. More than that, this specific good news is that Jerusalem, or Zion, is not permanently ruined. God will indeed redeem His people, even though He had previously punished them for their rebellion via their exile in Babylon. God reigns over all and has the power to save His chosen people.

Suggested Answer to Question 5

God chooses to redeem His people even after

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occupants killed or dragged away to exile. For all intents and purposes, Zion is worthless in its own helplessness. It is a time of stress and chaos, and surely those remaining in the city feel as though they are forgotten and abandoned by even God Himself. Their dreams and plans for a future as God's people are nothing but a memory, and it is their own fault, a result of their sin.

And yet, Isaiah declares there is hope for this ruined city. Amidst the chaos, a messenger appears on a distant mountain, bringing good news to a despondent people. The sentries on the crumbling walls take up the shout, overflowing with joy and relief.

What is this good news in the face of chaos and stress? God is still on His throne and will redeem His people. Yes, despite every difficult circumstance, Zion's God still reigns. God has returned to His dwelling place of Jerusalem, intending to redeem rather than to ruin, to deliver rather than to destroy. The captives will be freed from exile in Babylon, the enemy will be driven away, and the splendor of the city will be restored (52:1-2). In contrast to how Zion sees herself, as worthless and beaten down, God still sees Zion as His own people, beautiful and worthy of redemption. This passage is a call to awaken to the good news of Zion's redemption.

This good news is proclaimed even by the city itself, as the ruins burst into song. Everyone can see that God has returned to His dwelling place, to His people. They are comforted by God's keeping of His promises. They are redeemed from their captivity, just as they were redeemed before from the Egyptians and Assyrians (52:3-4). God has acted in such a mighty way that every nation will take notice and recognize that His power, and His power alone, took His people through such a stressful and chaotic time.

4. What is the good news in Isaiah's prophecy?

5. Why would God redeem His people after exile?

exile because, despite everything, Israel is still God's chosen people. God always keeps His promises, including those made hundreds of years earlier to Abraham that through His descendants the whole world would be blessed. Additionally, God redeems His people for His own glory, to show the world His power to intervene dramatically and

BIBLE EXTRA

The Articles of the Lord's House

The articles of the Lord's house, the temple, were used in ceremonial worship in ancient Israel. These are described in detail in 2 Chronicles 4 and 1 Kings 7. They include a bronze altar for sacrifices, a large metal sea (a sort of basin for the priests to wash in), ten smaller washing basins for cleaning burnt offerings, gold lampstands, gold sprinkling bowls, tables for ritual food, two free-standing pillars, and many smaller utensils such as pots, shovels, and meat forks. Most of these items have some deeper meaning behind their design, and all were consecrated to God for use in the temple.

Some of these articles were taken by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the initial wave of exile in 605 B.C. (Daniel 1:1-2), while some were left until Babylon came back and totally destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Jer. 27:19-22). In the ancient culture, these articles would have been seen as exceptional plunder for two reasons. First, they were made of precious and costly materials. Second, they held great significance to the captured people. After taking these sacred items, dedicated to God and used to worship Him, the Babylonians put them in their own idolatrous temple to demonstrate power over Israel's Deity.

When Israel returned from exile, these articles were brought out from Babylon's temple and inventoried to ensure none were missing (Ezra 1:7-11). Then, at long last, the articles were returned to Jerusalem with the returning exiles and restored to use in the temple, just as Jeremiah predicted (Jer. 27:22).

tangibly on behalf of His people.

A Second Exodus

Read Isaiah 52:11-12, remarking with your students on the following key points:

- God's people should leave their situation (in Babylon) and separate

BIBLE EXTRA

Zion

Zion is often another name for Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel. In Isaiah's prophecies, it can refer to the city of Jerusalem, the city and its inhabitants, or even the temple itself. Zion is often referred to as a character in the story of God's redeeming work, frequently with language of "her" and "she."

Throughout the Old Testament, there is a strong connection between Zion and the worship of God as the true king. In general, the prophets hold two beliefs about Zion: it is the holy abode of God, and it is protected by the presence of God.

However, in much of Isaiah, Zion is criticized for the faithlessness of God's people. Instead of being a holy people, Zion has become an enemy of holiness and righteousness, a prostitute and an adulteress. The Israelites have put their trust in foreign alliances and the military strength of others, rather than in God himself. They placed their hope in earthly kings, both foreign and their own, rather than in God, the true king.

Isaiah calls Zion to repentance, to trust God once again so He may dwell in the city. If the residents of Zion repent, they will be saved by God's justice and righteousness. If not, they will be destroyed by that same justice and righteousness. In the end, Isaiah declares that judgment is inevitable. Even though the people of Zion have the chance to repent, they will not, and this will lead to certain judgment and destruction.

And yet, out of judgment, there will be redemption for Zion, Isaiah proclaims. Even more, Zion is not just the recipient of this Good News of salvation. Rather, Zion itself participates in the telling of this Good News, joining in the proclamation as a messenger (a natural understanding of the original Hebrew text in Isaiah 40:9).

themselves from uncleanness.

- Those who take care of God's things—the priests and Levites—should come out and be pure.

- God's people can do this calmly, not hastily or in panic.

- God Himself will protect them, before and behind, so they need not fear.

Suggested Answer to Question 6

It reminds Israel of a time when God worked for them in a mighty way before, saving them from what seemed to be insurmountable oppression. It recalls the ways that God's hand has acted in the world before, tangibly delivering His people from foreign captivity. Even though there is no

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A Second Exodus

Isaiah 52:11-12, KJV

11 Depart ye, depart ye,
go ye out from thence,
touch no unclean thing; go
ye out of the midst of her;
be ye clean, that bear the
vessels of the LORD.

12 For ye shall not go
out with haste, nor go by
flight: for the LORD will go
before you; and the God of
Israel will be your reward.

Isaiah 52:11-12, NIV

¹¹Depart, depart, go out from
there!

Touch no unclean thing!
Come out from it and be pure,
you who carry the articles of
the LORD's house.

¹²But you will not leave in haste
or go in flight;
for the LORD will go before you,
the God of Israel will be your
rear guard.

The command to "Depart, depart" echoes the beginning of Isaiah 52, where Zion is told to "Awake, awake." The further command, to "go out," brings to mind images of the Exodus, when Israel was freed from their captivity in Egypt. This allusion is not accidental or coincidental, but an intentional image of hope from God through Isaiah. There will be a second exodus, a second exit from captivity and oppression under a foreign nation.

However, there are some significant differences between this exodus and the one from Egypt. The Egyptian exodus took place quickly, as the Israelites needed to hurry before the Egyptian army pursued them. They were to eat the Passover meal "with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover" (Exod. 12:11). This next exodus, however, will be a slower exit—they will not "leave in haste or go in flight" (Isa. 52:12).

Additionally, what they bring with them will be different than the first exodus. When they fled from Egypt, the Israelites were told to take everything they could from the Egyptians. They asked for and received articles of silver and gold, clothing, and large droves of livestock (Exod. 12:35, 38). In this exodus, in contrast, Israel will

timeframe provided, it does provide hope that it will be soon, and Israel should be ready for their redemption.

Suggested Answer to Question 7

In bringing the articles from the Lord's house, the temple, it again gives Israel hope. Rather than hope of physical deliverance, it gives them hope that there is still an opportunity for them to be in covenant relationship with God, that He wants to reinstate the system of sacrifice and ritual purification through which Israel may be in relationship with Him. More than just a physical hope, this is a spiritual hope.

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leave everything unclean behind, carrying only the articles of the Lord's house with them. God calls the priests and Levites "you who carry the articles of the LORD's house"—to "come out from it and be pure" (Isa. 52:11), which means to leave behind the Babylonian system of idolatry and occult practices that had helped ruin the nation of Israel (47:11–15).

Despite these differences from the first exodus, there is one significant similarity: in both instances, the presence of God goes with the refugees. Just as God traveled with the Israelites from Egypt, manifesting His presence through columns of fire and smoke, God "will go before you" and "be your rear guard" (Isa. 52:12) as they return from Babylon. Through this, God will receive glory among all the nations.

There is more being left behind in the exodus than merely Babylon and the "unclean" things. There is a sense, as Isaiah calls Israel to "go out from there," that Israel is being called to return to their covenant, to once again be a community in covenant with God. Paul alludes to a similar meaning in 2 Corinthians 6:17, as he warns against idolatry and calls followers of Christ to step out of darkness and into light. This summons is an invitation for Israel to have a fresh start, leaving behind their idolatry

and rebellion, living fully in the presence of God.

6. Why does the allusion to the Exodus from Egypt bring hope?

7. What is significant about Israel taking the articles of the Lord's house with them?



These Egyptian gold and silver vessels may be like some of the objects from the temple that the exiles brought back to Jerusalem.

Photo: Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915

BIBLE EXTRA

Depart, Depart!

Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe says, "It seems strange that God would have to urge His people to leave a place of captivity, but some of them had grown accustomed to Babylon and were reluctant to leave. The first group, about 50,000 people, left Babylon in 539–538 B.C. when Cyrus issued his decree. They were under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, and Jeshua the high priest (Ezra 1–2). They carried with them 'the vessels of the Lord' (Isa. 52:11, KJV), the articles that were needed for the service in the temple. A second group of nearly 1,800 people led by Ezra left in 458 B.C. God commanded them to depart because Babylon was a condemned city (Jer. 50:8ff.; 51:6, 45). He warned them not to linger but to get out quickly while they had the opportunity (Isa. 48:20)."

WINDOW ON THE WORD

War-Tested Faith

When Russia invaded Ukraine in March 2022, many Ukrainians were caught by surprise despite the fact that troops had been gathering at the borders and international observers had been warning of an impending invasion for weeks. Ukraine's Christians had hoped and prayed that God would intervene to stop the disaster. He didn't, but during a brutal bombardment, He showed in many ways His presence among His people. A Christian family prayed through the night and found two unexploded shells next to their house the next morning. Truck after truck of humanitarian supplies got through dangerous checkpoints to sustain life and hope. Sunday services continued in bomb shelters, homes, and damaged churches, proclaiming good news to people who did not follow Jesus. God does not always spare us from suffering, but He is always present in it with us.

3 Bible Application

Envision how God's promises to His people can encourage us in our situations.

The following activities will help students consider ways that God's promises can encourage them in their own challenging life situations. You may want to photocopy this page and give the instructions to each group. Make enough copies of the handout from the teacher's resource kit to give to the group using it.



Handout:

'Pursue Holiness'

Read the handout and then answer the questions on it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "Shame or Celebration" and answer **Questions 8, 9, 10, and 11**. God is continually bringing good out of bad situations (Gen. 50:20). It is not easy to admit when we have done wrong because of our pride and perhaps our fear of people laughing at us, but admitting errors is the way to finding joy and peace. When people admit their mistakes to us, we should point them to God's forgiveness and admit that we too have our own mistakes to confess.

Good News Story

Write headlines that would make you ecstatically joyful. If you have trouble thinking of examples, suggest things related to world peace, curing disease, or economic prosperity. Keep the headlines positive—nothing negative about a politician you don't like, for example. Share some examples with the class.

The Future Is Now

Brainstorm a list of characteristics of what heaven will be like such as "God will wipe our tears away." Finally, highlight those aspects of heaven we can already start enjoying today ("We can enjoy a relationship with God, right now"). Based on the highlighted list, do you feel you have sufficient grounds to feel peace and joy today, even amid difficult circumstances? How do you think you can sustain this perspective throughout the week?

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Shame or Celebration?

Carlita wasn't married when she got pregnant and gave birth to her baby, Gabby. Her family was horrified. They were Christians and leaders in the church. Not knowing how to break the news without breaking their reputation, they kept the pregnancy a secret, even after she was born. Although they didn't receive guests, one afternoon an aunt stopped by. When Carlita returned from a doctor's appointment with Gabby. The aunt saw them and drew the correct conclusion.

Realizing that their secret had been revealed, Carlita and her mother began to cry. But Rosita, the aunt, asked to hold the baby. Cradling Gabby, Rosita smiled, held the baby's tiny hand, and kissed her on the forehead. "Little one," she said, "the world is full of mistakes, but you are not one of them. May God Himself show you His purpose and make you a blessing to our family. Welcome, Gabriella."

Every day people make mistakes, but God is able to bring joy and blessing from them all. Sometimes we can be so overwhelmed by our guilt and shame, and so worried about what other people will think, that we miss the opportunity to glorify God for His forgiveness and enjoy the blessings He brings into our lives. If we share with others how we have been forgiven, they can rejoice with us in God's gracious restoration of our lives.

- 8.** *When is a time you knew you made the wrong decision, but God brought blessing out of it anyway?*
- 9.** *How easy is it to admit your mistakes or areas of temptation to others? What are you afraid will happen if you do?*
- 10.** *How do you respond when someone confesses a sin or weakness to you?*
- 11.** *What are some ways you can point toward celebration of God's grace rather than condemnation for sin?*

4 Life Response

Decide to respond in faith even when our circumstances seem hopeless.

In this step, guide your students to consider how to respond in faith even when their circumstances seem hopeless. Their challenge is to look beyond their immediate difficult circumstances to God's faithfulness to us and to His people in the past, to see His promises to them and to us for the future. Now have your class read "Living by Faith, Not by Sight" in the student book, and discuss which they find more helpful, looking to the past or to the future. When can it be unhealthy to remember the

past or dream about the future? How do we keep these things in balance in such a way that we are motivated to move forward in the present?

If your class is musically inclined, guide them to sing a chorus or hymn on the theme of God's faithfulness to His promises—for example, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" or "Standing on the Promises." Praise choruses on this theme include "Holiness" by Sonicflood (the verse with "faithfulness") or "Faithfulness" by Hillsong.

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Living by Faith, Not by Sight

According to 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We live by faith and not by sight." We are blessed to live after the first coming of Christ. However, we need to live patiently by faith until His second coming, when our faith will change to sight.

► *List two areas in your life where you have to walk by faith now, not seeing how God will work those out for you. Then think of two examples in which you walked by faith in the past, but God resolved those so that you now see His blessing.*

Two areas where you must currently walk by faith:

Two areas where you can now see how God has resolved those issues:

KEY VERSE

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!
—Isaiah 52:7, KJV

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
—Isaiah 52:7, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of June 5 through June 11

(See [The Quiet Hour](#) and [Cross devotionals](#) on these passages.)

Mon. Ezekiel 47:1-12—The River of Life.

Tues. John 16:19-33—Receiving Everlasting Joy.

Wed. James 3:13-18—The Right Kind of Spirit.

Thurs. Psalm 4—Peace Amid Distress.

Fri. Psalm 46—God Is Our Refuge.

Sat. Ephesians 2:11-22—Christ Is Our Peace.

Sun. Isaiah 65:17-25—A New Heaven and Earth.

End the class with a final prayer such as this: "Thank You, Lord, for Your everlasting faithfulness to Your people in all ages, including to us today. See each of our needs, see how the evil one buffets our lives to tempt us to reject You. Help us remain faithful to You, as You are faithful to us. Help us to see and feel and hear Your presence. And make our joy overflow through Your generous Spirit of joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of [Lesson Leaflet](#) to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read Isaiah 65:17-25. Ask your students to think about how they would answer this question: "If sin did not exist, how would your life be different?"

E V A N G E L I S M

Leading Your Students to Christ

Did you know your Sunday school classroom can be a mission field?

Most or all of the people attending your class may already have a personal relationship with Jesus.

But others may not, and unbelievers may visit your class. If you sense that an unbeliever is ready to accept Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior, take the time to encourage this person and share the Gospel message. You may know the thrill of introducing someone to the kingdom of God.

Here are some guidelines to consider when speaking to someone about becoming a Christian.



• Present the Gospel clearly and simply.

Here are four points the unsaved adults in your class should know.

- 1 All of us have sinned and need forgiveness if we are to have eternal life with God (**Rom. 3:23**).
- 2 Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the Cross for our sins and rose again (**1 Cor. 15:3-4**). In His death, Christ paid for our sins (**1 Pet. 2:24**), and in His resurrection, He overcame the power of death (**Heb. 2:14-15**).
- 3 You need to acknowledge your sins and repent, believing that Christ died and rose again. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (**Rom. 10:9, KJV**).

- 4 You will be saved, forgiven, adopted into God’s family, and given heavenly riches (**Eph. 1:3-7**).

• **Explain how someone can respond to Christ’s invitation.** Tell the students that they can come to Christ through a sincere prayer of faith in Christ for eternal life.

• **Describe the adventure of discipleship.** If one of the adults in your class receives Christ as his or her personal Savior, make sure the new believer knows that conversion is just the beginning of life as a disciple of the Lord.

But God commendeth **His**
love toward us, in that,
while we were yet sinners,
Christ **died** for us.
—Romans 5:8, KJV

ADULT TEACHER'S COMMENTARY

LESSON CYCLE

FOR 2022—2025

SEPTEMBER

DECEMBER

MARCH

JUNE

2022/23

Chosen, Not Choice:
God's Exceptional Choice
(Studies in Genesis, Exodus,
Deuteronomy, Judges,
1 Samuel, Ephesians)

Chosen, Not Choice:
Darkness to Light
(Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isa-
iah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians,
2 Timothy, James, Peter)

Chosen, Not Choice:
God Calls Us
(Studies in the Gospels, Acts)

The Righteous Reign of God
(Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel,
Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew,
Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)

2023/24

God's Law Is Love *
(Studies in Luke, John, Romans,
Galatians, Acts, 1 Corinthians)

Faith That Pleases God
(Studies in 1 Samuel, Ruth,
2 Chronicles, Proverbs,
Prophets, Matthew, Luke,
Hebrews, Romans)

Examining Our Faith
(Studies in the Gospels, Acts,
Romans, 2 Corinthians,
1 Peter, Jude)

Hope in the Lord
(Studies in Psalms, Lamenta-
tions, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthi-
ans, Colossians, Hebrews,
1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)

2024/25

Worship in the Covenant
(Studies in Genesis, Exodus,
1 Kings, 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles,
Isaiah, Psalms, John)

A King Forever and Ever
(Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel,
Psalms, Matthew, Luke)

Costly Sacrifices
(Studies in the Exodus, Leviticus,
Numbers, Deuteronomy,
1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Matthew,
Hebrews, 1 John, Revelation)

Sacred Altars
and Holy Offerings
(Studies in Genesis, Matthew,
Luke, John, Romans, 1 Corinthi-
ans, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)

Adult Teacher's Commentary lessons are organized according to the International Sunday School Lessons' thematic study of the Bible. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes and messages through studies of the books of both the Old and New Testaments.

* Next quarter's study

Coming Up Next Quarter

September, October, November 2023

'God's Law Is Love'

This quarter considers the role of God's law as it relates to faith in Christ. **Unit 1** draws on the Gospels to show Jesus contrasting empty acts of piety with performing the justice and love of God, interpreting what it means to honor the Sabbath, and showing God is the one qualified to judge a sinner's failures.

In **Unit 2**, lessons from Romans and Galatians contrast the inability of the law to provide justification. Paul says God wants circumcised hearts, and he pleads with the Galatians to hold fast to faith in Christ and not to revert to law-keeping for justification.

In **Unit 3**, the Jerusalem Conference shows how Gentiles need not submit to the law because salvation comes through faith in Christ, not the law. Paul examines how the law finds its fulfillment in the commandment to love, he contrasts the hollowness of human traditions with the fullness of God found in Christ, and he warns that Christian liberty not become a license for sin.

