Also Available for Bible Grades 11–12
Missio Dei: Joining God on the Adventure of a Lifetime is a semester Bible course for upper–high school students. The term missio Dei means literally “the mission of God.” Missio Dei invites students to explore and engage in God's mission as the foundation for the story of the Bible, as the lens through which we all relate to others cross-culturally, as the centerpiece of history, and as the driving force for living “missionally” in whatever context we find ourselves. The course invites students to enter into a deeper understanding of God through joining Him on the adventure of a lifetime.

Table of Contents

Course Introduction

SE Chapter 3  The Invitation: Blessed to Be a Blessing

TE Lesson 8  What a Blessing Is
   Journal Entry 8 Abraham’s Diary Entry
   Journal Entry 9  Top Lines, Bottom Lines

TE Lesson 9  The Faith of Abraham
   Journal Entry 10 Reflection on the Lesson
   Journal Entry 11 “The Parable of the Race”

TE Lesson 10  Cats, Dogs, and Footraces
   Blackline Master 3.1  Unpacking “The Parable of the Race”
   Journal Entry 12  Cat and Dog Theology
   Journal Entry 13  Inflow/Outflow Inventory

Link to more resources in our community at www.missiodei-thejourney.com.
# Table of Contents

The following includes a list of the student edition chapters and their corresponding teacher edition lessons.

## Unit One: Bible Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Introduction: Welcome to the Journey</th>
<th>Course Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 The Bible, God’s Story</td>
<td>Lesson 1 The Beginning of the Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 2 What I Know About the Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 The Mission of God</td>
<td>Lesson 3 The Bible as One Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 4 Bearers of God’s Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 The Invitation: Blessed to Be a Blessing</td>
<td>Lesson 5 A Heart for All Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 The Kingdom of God</td>
<td>Lesson 6 Relationships, Redemption, and Reconciliation: Part 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Behind Enemy Lines</td>
<td>Lesson 7 Relationships, Redemption, and Reconciliation: Part 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6 Review: God’s Purpose and Mission</td>
<td>Lesson 8 What a Blessing Is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 9 The Faith of Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 10 Cats, Dogs, and Footraces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 11 The Kingdom: Now and Not Yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 12 Our Need for Eyes to See</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 13 Who the Enemy Is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 14 Abiding in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson 15 The Weapons of War</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Unit Two: Culture Unit

| Chapter 7 God’s View of Culture              | Lesson 17 Culture and God’s View of It |
| Chapter 8 Cultural Pitfalls                 | Lesson 18 Misunderstandings, Ethnocentrism, and Premature Judgments |
| Chapter 9 The Incarnation                   | Lesson 19 The Nacirema and Ethnocentrism |
| Chapter 10 God’s View of People             | Lesson 20 The Incarnation |
| Chapter 11 Between a Rock and a Hard Place  | Lesson 21 Going to the Margins in Love |
| Chapter 12 Cross-Cultural Case Studies      | Lesson 22 A Big, Big World |
| Chapter 13 Review: The Lens of Culture      | Lesson 23 Identifying Cultural Distance |
|                                             | Lesson 24 Incarnational Living |
|                                             | Lesson 25 Evaluating Case Studies |
|                                             | Lesson 26 Review: The Lens of Culture |
### Unit Three: History Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 14</th>
<th>How God Works Through History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 15</td>
<td>Era One: The Beginnings of the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 16</td>
<td>Era Two: AD 100 to 600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 17</td>
<td>Era Three: AD 600 to 1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 18</td>
<td>Era Four: AD 1500 to 1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 19</td>
<td>Era Five: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 20</td>
<td>Review: The Ultimate Completion of God’s Purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Lesson 27 | God’s Purpose Advancing Throughout History |
| Lesson 28 | Introduction to the Era Chapters |
| Lesson 29 | Era One |
| Lesson 30 | Era Two |
| Lesson 31 | Era Three |
| Lesson 32 | Era Four |
| Lesson 33 | Era Five: Part 1 |
| Lesson 34 | Era Five: Part 2 |
| Lesson 35 | Review: The Ultimate Completion of God’s Purpose |

### Unit Four: Practices Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 21</th>
<th>Intimacy with God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 22</td>
<td>Spiritual Passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 23</td>
<td>The Spiritual Passion of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 24</td>
<td>Community Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 25</td>
<td>The Purpose of Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 26</td>
<td>Celebration: The End of the Story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Lesson 36 | Intimacy with God |
| Lesson 37 | Practicing Intimacy with God |
| Lesson 38 | More Practicing Intimacy with God |
| Lesson 39 | Passion: Part 1 |
| Lesson 40 | Passion: Part 2 |
| Lesson 41 | Loving God, Loving People |
| Lesson 42 | Taking the Opportunity |
| Lesson 43 | Community |
| Lesson 44 | The Purpose of Community |
| Lesson 45 | Christian Community as Witness |
| Lesson 46 | The Rest of the Story |
| Lesson 47 | A Celebration! |
| Lesson 48 | Reflecting and Looking Forward |
Missio Dei: Joining God on the Adventure of a Lifetime is a collection of things to think about and practices to embrace as you move down the path of your life. The contents of this book are like the items you might put together in preparation for a hiking trip or some other sort of cross-country sojourn. So, what can you expect?

Well, don’t expect this book to be a guide to life with one-size-fits-all answers for you. Only God can give you the answers you need to navigate the terrain of your own life. And only in close relationship with Him can you discover what He has in store for your particular journey with Him. What you will find in this book are some tools to help you along your journey. These tools fall into four categories—Bible, culture, history, and practice—so there are four units within this book. They can be thought of as four different lenses through which to view the mission of God.

The first unit focuses specifically on the Bible, the compass part of your travel kit. It is the tool that points you in the right direction for meeting God and joining Him in His mission. You cannot participate with Him without knowing what the Bible says. So, naturally, that is our starting point. And if you think you already know what the Bible has to say about your life with God, you might be in for a surprise!

The second unit looks through the lens of culture. You can think of this section as the binoculars in your travel kit—the lenses that give you an opportunity to see beyond your immediate surroundings to the bigger, wondrous world around you. Doing this is important because we tend to be consumed by our own surroundings and our own culture. But God is not limited to one culture or one context to work through. He is at work all around the world, in ways that might amaze you. In the chapters on culture, we are going to pick up the binoculars and take a wide-angle look around to see what God’s thoughts are on these matters.

The third section of the course focuses on the narrative of history. You can think of this section of the course as a travelogue, a collection of stories from those who have come before you on this journey. Many, many people have participated with God on His mission throughout history. Checking out their perspectives, successes, and failures is instructive to us as we consider our world today. If you were planning a trip to a city that is new to you, you might consult someone who had been there before to find out the best places to stay and eat, and to learn about the best activities there. The History Unit lets you read about the varied experiences of those in the past as you prepare to journey with God in the future. Henri J. M. Nouwen says, “I have to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus and on those who followed him and trust that I will know how to live out my mission to be a sign of hope in this world” (1994). We focus on mission in the past as a way of affirming that God has always been at work and that He continues to invite us to join Him in that work to the present moment.

Finally, Missio Dei concludes with a unit called “Practices.” Think of this section as a backpack full of essentials. On a hiking trip, you would want to make sure you have some food and water in your pack as well as other items to make your hike more manageable. In the same way, the final chapters of this book will help you explore some basic and essential practices that will nourish and assist you on your journey with God. From intimacy with God, to spiritual passion, to embracing community, we will explore some things you’ll want to have as you move through life. Just as you wouldn’t leave town without a few basic necessities, you won’t want to go too far down the road with God without understanding some of the things you need to make that journey the best it can be.

Throughout the coming chapters, you can expect to be challenged not only in your thinking but in how you live your day-to-day experience with God and others. You will be asked to consider new ideas.
and to take steps into new experiences in your relationship with Jesus. Perhaps some of this thinking and action will take you outside your comfort zone. But stretching our muscles is the only way we can hike farther and longer than we have before. You are invited to stretch yourself, to participate, and to enter into a deeper understanding of the adventure of a lifetime that God invites you to join Him on.

We close with another quote from [Leonard I.] Sweet: “Imagine how different the Christian life would be if it was understood not as something to ponder or to observe in others—but as the one thing in life that has to be fully experienced” (2007, 29). Furthermore, imagine how different life would be if we as believers in Christ understood that the experience of life with God isn’t simply to make our own lives richer—in other words, to fulfill our individual needs—but it is to fulfill a much-larger purpose. What if we recognized that God is calling us to something grand, larger than ourselves, and best lived not individually but in community, in a kingdom? These are some of the terrains we will be covering during the course of this book.

Big Ideas

Course Introduction
- Participating in missio Dei is the adventure of a lifetime.

Bible Unit
- The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tells the story of God’s purpose.
- God’s purpose is relationship, redemption, and reconciliation.
- God invites us to participate in His purpose; He blesses us so that we can bless others.
- God’s story is unfolding as we see and participate in God’s kingdom throughout the earth.
- The spread of God’s kingdom takes place in the context of warfare with Satan.

Culture Unit
- Effectively communicating God’s story requires an intimate understanding of culture and God’s view of it.
- The incarnation of Jesus is the model for reaching out to all people, whether within one’s own culture or across cultural boundaries. Jesus tells us not only what to communicate but how to communicate it.
- The process of reaching out across cultures can be enhanced by a study of people.
- God’s people must learn to connect incarnationally with others in significant cross-cultural relationships.

History Unit
- God initiates and advances His purpose throughout human history.
- History reveals the challenges, successes, and shortcomings that people throughout history have experienced as they have participated with God in completing His purpose.
- God’s redemptive purpose will come to an ultimate completion in human history.

Practices Unit
- Participating in missio Dei requires a personal intimacy with God.
- Participating in missio Dei requires spiritual passion.
- Participating in missio Dei is lived out in the context of community.
- Missio Dei culminates in the gathering of every tribe, tongue, language, and nation around the throne of God.
The Invitation:
Blessed to Be a Blessing

What the gospel offers … is the opportunity to be drawn into something larger than ourselves—into God’s overflowing love that moves out in ever-widening circles, embracing the whole of creation. The gospel sees our humanity not in terms of needs to be met, but in terms of capacities and gifts to be offered in God’s gracious service. We are created not to consume but to know God, not merely to meet our own needs but to participate in God’s life and mission. —James V. Brownson, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West

By now it should be very clear to you that when we look into the Bible, we see what God is doing. In the previous chapters, we’ve established that the Bible is a story about God. As the main character, God is working to bring about His purpose—a pure, unblemished relationship with humankind, the pinnacle of His creation.

As we read the story of the Bible, we see God as He reaches out in relationship to us. Because of this, we sometimes get confused and believe the story of the Bible is about us. It is true that God desires to be in relationship with us; He desires it so much that He went to great expense to lavish His love on us through Christ. As we examined previously, God pursues relationship with us through redeeming us from our fallen state and reconciling us to Himself. What a blessing this is!

But if we stop there, we have missed the point. If we focus only on the relationship we can have with God and the blessings we receive from Him, then we are hearing only half of the message. If we come to the Bible with eyes only toward what we can get from God in terms of comfort, ease, and blessing, then we have misread the story, because the story is larger than that. God invites us to participate in His purpose; He “blesses us so that we can bless others.” But what does
this mean? It means, quite simply, that He is giving us an invitation
to join Him. God is asking us to go along with Him on mission, and
His mission is far-reaching—to the peoples of the world and to the
depths of people’s hearts. This has been His plan for us throughout
His story in the Bible, and it is a very exciting plan! Let’s take a look.

The Bible begins with a beautiful setting and a very significant
tree—the Garden of Eden and the tree of the knowledge of good
and evil described in Genesis 1–3. The Bible concludes with
another beautiful setting and another significant tree—the new
Jerusalem of heaven and the tree of life whose leaves “are for the
healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2)—nations that have been
cursed by inheriting Adam’s sin nature. What happens in the time
between these two beautiful settings is the story of God’s purpose
being carried out to completion. As author and pastor Rob Bell
says, “We live between the trees” (2005a).

The Bible continues with a narrative of humankind’s ongoing sin-
ful rebellion against God in Genesis 3–11, resulting in men and
women being alienated both from God and from each other. These
chapters culminate with the people’s prideful attempt to construct
the monument known as the tower of Babel, which resulted in the
confusion of communication and the scattering of the nations “over
all the earth” (Genesis 11:8). Christopher J. H. Wright says the fol-
lowing in The Mission of God:

Genesis 1–11 poses a cosmic question to which God must provide a
cosmic answer. The problems so graphically spread before the reader
in Genesis 1–11 will not be solved just by finding a way to get human
beings to heaven when they die. Death itself must be destroyed if the
curse is to be removed and the way opened to the tree of life. The love
and power of God must address not only the sin of individuals but
also the strife and strivings of nations; not only the need of human
beings but also the suffering of animals and the curse on the ground.
(2006, 199)

So what does God do next, according to Wright? “He sees an
elderly, childless couple in the land of Babel and decides to make
them the fountainhead, the launch pad of his whole mission of
cosmic redemption…. The call of Abram is the beginning of God’s
answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of nations and the
groaning brokenness of his whole creation” (2006, 199). This event,
which propels us into the heart of the story of the Bible, begins in
Genesis 12 with Abraham, as you will recall from chapter 1.

A Word About the Nations

Did you know that the Bible words translated as “nation” or “nations”
mean something different than what we typically think of when we hear
those words? Usually we think the word nation is synonymous with the
word country, which brings to mind places such as India, Kenya, China,
or the United States. According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary,
the geopolitical definition of nation is “a community of people composed
of one or more nationalities and possessing a more or less defined
territory and government.” But when you see nation or nations in the Bible,
the term generally has a different meaning, one related more to ideas
of ethnicity, common language, and culture than to a particular country.

This distinction is important because a nation (as we tend to think of it)
can have many cultural and ethnic groups within its geopolitical borders.
In fact, today in our world there are more than six billion individuals living
in over 230 geopolitical nations, but these nations are divided into more
than sixteen thousand specific groups of people, or people groups. This
concept of a biblical nation as more than our idea of a geopolitical nation
has great implications for the scope of mission that God invites us to join.

Notes

1. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v.
“nation,” http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/
(accessed April 17, 2008).
2. Joshua Project, “Ethne Overview,”
http://www.joshuaproject.net/ethne.php
(accessed April 14, 2008).

By permission. From the Merriam-Webster
Online Dictionary ©2008 by Merriam-
Webster, Incorporated (www.Merriam-
Webster.com).
The story of Abraham marks a very important and pivotal point in the Bible. Paul, in his writings to the churches in Galatia, refers to the opening lines of Genesis 12 as nothing less than the "gospel in advance" (Galatians 3:8). It is here that we see the beginning of the great narrative story of the Bible—a God who is pursuing relationship with people in all nations of the earth. With the introduction of this particular story, God begins revealing His mission to redeem and reconcile us to Himself so that we might enjoy things the way He intended them to be in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Wright says that “God’s mission is what fills the gap between the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11 and the healing of the nations in Revelation 22” (2006, 455).

John R. W. Stott sums up the significance of the call of Abraham and the opening lines of Genesis 12: “God made a promise … to Abraham. And an understanding of that promise is indispensable to an understanding of the Bible and of the Christian mission. These are perhaps the most unifying verses in the Bible” (1979). So, how does Genesis 12 begin?

The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. (Genesis 12:1–4)

"The whole of God’s purpose is encapsulated here,” says Stott (1979). That’s worth examining more closely. First, it is almost impossible to overlook the word bless in this passage. Either alone or as a root word, bless occurs five times in the space of two verses. So, it is clear that God intends here to announce His desire to offer blessing. But there is more here than just a blessing for Abraham. What Stott calls the encapsulation of “the whole of God’s purpose” is God’s clearly stated intention to bless “all peoples on earth” through Abraham. Of course, from our vantage point in history and in the completed narrative of the Bible, we can see that God’s intention to bless all nations has indeed come (and is coming) to fruition through Christ, the direct descendant of Abraham. We will examine this connection between Abraham and Jesus more closely later. As the name of Jesus is proclaimed throughout all the earth,
the missional purpose of God to bless all nations with the opportunity for relationship with Him is marching forward through time.

So, there is a long-range plan announced in this passage. And just in case Abraham—or anyone else—might have missed it, God returned to Abraham and extended and reaffirmed this promise several times. First, He extended the promise to include a covenant gift of land to Abraham's descendants (Genesis 15:1–21). Next, God declared that the covenant between Him and Abraham would be marked by the sign of circumcision (Genesis 17:1–22). Finally, at the end of the moving passage describing Abraham's unquestioning obedience to God's command to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's son, God restates His initial promise to Abraham and reiterates His intention to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 22:15–18).

Not only did God make this purpose clear to Abraham several times, but He reaffirmed His intentions to Abraham's son Isaac when He told him, “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 26:4). Finally, Abraham's grandson Jacob also receives a restatement of this promise of blessing during a dream recorded in Genesis 28:12–15. Again God promises, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring” (Genesis 28:14). Repeatedly God states His intention to bless not just Abraham and his family, but all nations.

Despite the prominence of the idea of blessing in Genesis 12:1–4, it is not the only important thing to notice in this passage. Abraham didn’t just get to sit back and receive a lot of blessing. Something else was at work also. If you look again at the passage, you’ll notice that it has an interesting structure. Yes, five different references to bless or blessing are made in verses 2 and 3. But these verses are sandwiched between two verses that involve a specific command and a specific act of obedience. The command came in Genesis 12:1: “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’ ” In other words, without a lot of explanation or detail, God commanded him to go. God desired for Abraham to be set apart from his former identity, to be re-created into the man God intended him to be. In the same way that we become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), God called Abraham to be set apart in a very literal way—by leaving behind just about everything that was familiar to him.

What’s in a Name?
The man we refer to as Abraham in this chapter is the man who was originally called Abram. In fact, in Genesis 11:27, the verse that first introduces us to him, he is called Abram. In a powerful encounter recorded in Genesis 17:5, God changes Abram's name to Abraham: “No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”

*Abra* means “Exalted Father,” but *Abraham* means “father of many,” according to a study note in the NIV Study Bible. So, in this significant renaming, which accompanied the covenant of circumcision, God is declaring by the very name He gives to Abraham that He will do what He has promised.

Following the tradition of New Testament writers and many others since, all references to this man in this chapter use his new name, Abraham, whether in reference to him before or after his renaming. The only exceptions are in direct quotations from Bible passages that refer to him as Abram, such as Genesis 12:1–4.
Genesis 12:1 is the first part of a type of “If …, then …” statement by God—“If you go, then I will bless.” Abraham was offered an invitation to obey. And in Genesis 12:4, we see that he chose to do just that: “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him.” By faith, Abraham followed God's command. If the relationship between obedience and blessing is not clear in Genesis 12, it is set out very definitely in the Genesis 22 reaffirmation of this covenant. Here God plainly states the relationship between Abraham's obedience and the blessing: “And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Genesis 22:18). Through obedience to God, Abraham embraced another facet of the promise of blessing—that he was blessed in order that he might be a blessing to others. Obedience on Abraham's part led to blessing not only for himself but also for those around him and for those who came after him. This is blessing with a purpose. The intention God had for calling Abraham, and therefore Israel, into a special covenantal relationship with Him was with a view toward His ultimate plan of blessing all the nations through Israel. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. observes the following about Abraham: “This man and his descendants were to be missionaries and channels of the truth from the very beginning” (1999, 12).

We cannot overlook an extremely important component of Abraham's act of obedience: faith. Without faith, Abraham could not have gone to an undisclosed location, leaving behind all that was familiar. Abraham had to have faith to believe God even when he was not able to see with his own eyes the fulfillment of God's promise. To aid in this walk of faith, God gave Abraham a vision of the promise to hold on to. In Genesis 15, when Abraham questioned God about this faith to believe even though he had no children, God promised Abraham that he would have “a son coming from [his] own body” (v. 4). Then God took Abraham outside and showed him the sky: “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them … So shall your offspring be” (v. 5). Can you imagine being childless and looking into the night sky at the millions of stars and being told that your descendants would be as numerous as them? This mental image would be something that Abraham would remember the rest of his life and ponder on those days when things didn't look so good. It took faith to believe God and that vision, but “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (v. 6). It takes faith to obey—faith in the living God, Creator of the universe, who desires...
relationship with each of us. That is the faith of Abraham, and it is the same faith we are invited to have today.

Let’s return to the idea of blessing with a purpose. In Genesis 12:1–4, we see an invitation from God for Abraham to be blessed, but it is a blessing with a specific purpose. A mission to all the nations is embedded in the lines of promise found in Genesis 12:2–3. This promise of purpose and mission is held before Abraham, but it required a response on His part. That response enabled Abraham’s part in the mission to go forward. This pattern is modeled again and again in the Bible.

In his book *Unveiled at Last*, Bob Sjogren talks about the concept of reading the Bible in a way that looks for what he calls “top lines” and “bottom lines” in a particular passage. A top-line verse concerns a blessing that is promised or offered, and a bottom-line verse is one that concerns a responsibility or a response that is required. Top-line verses are often accompanied by bottom-line verses somewhere nearby. The fact is that some of us read the Bible looking only for those top-line blessings we can receive without taking a look at the bottom-line response or responsibility that comes alongside the blessing. This is the difference between reading the Bible as a story about us and our plans and reading it as a story about God and His plans. For example, Sjogren applies this pattern to Genesis 12:1–4: “The top line refers to God’s blessing of Israel. He wants to bless His people. The bottom-line responsibility reveals that He wants His people not only to enjoy that blessing, but then to turn around and be a blessing to all families on the face of the earth” (1992, 29).

When we read the Bible with an eye on God’s plan rather than our own, we can see beyond our own desires to a picture of a purpose: a purpose that is much bigger than ourselves, a purpose that God invites us to participate in. The ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose of relationship, redemption, and reconciliation is described in Revelation 7:9, which says, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” This picture of a diverse throng of worshippers around God’s throne is the fulfillment of God’s desires expressed to Abraham. Throughout the Bible we see God using Israel to reveal Himself to the nations in different ways. Among the examples is the blessing of Gentiles such as Rahab of Jericho (Joshua 2:1–21) and Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law (Exodus 18:1–12). Later, David’s faith gave bold testimony of
God's greatness to the Philistines who were gathered en masse to witness the defeat of Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Consider the temple of Solomon, completed during his reign, which contained an outer court dedicated to the Gentiles (1 Kings 8:41–43). During Israel's captivity, the faithfulness of servants such as Daniel brought blessing and faith in God to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and a later ruler of Babylon, King Darius the Mede (Daniel 2:46–49, 3:28–30, 6:19–28). Old Testament prophets often spoke of many nations worshipping God, not to mention God's commissioning of the reluctant prophet Jonah as a missionary to the entire Gentile nation of Ninevah. The Bible reveals a continuation of this theme of God's heart for people of all nations through the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Speaking of Jesus, what about the phrase “the gospel in advance” that we referred to earlier? Galatians 3:7–8 says, “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ ” What does the gospel have to do with Israel and the Old Testament? According to Christopher Wright, “the ingathering of the nations was the very thing Israel existed for in the purpose of God; it was the fulfillment of the bottom line of God's promise to Abraham” (2006, 194). The “ingathering of the nations” Wright refers to is that which the New Testament shows the beginnings of in Acts 1:8—Jesus’ commission to believers to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. It is the mission that continues to this day, the mission that will be completed so that the worship around the throne of God pictured in Revelation 7:9 will come to fruition.

Paul brings clarity to the direct link between Abraham and Jesus: “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed” (Galatians 3:16). The Scripture does not say “to his seeds,” meaning many people, but “to his seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. Here we see the connection between the promise given to Abraham and the ultimate fulfillment of these promises that came through Abraham’s descendant, Jesus Christ. And it doesn't stop there. The promise reaches out to you and me. According to Paul, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28–29). Thus, the faith of Abraham paved the way for the birth

When we read the Bible with an eye on God's plan rather than our own, we can see beyond our own desires to a picture of a purpose: ... a purpose that God invites us to participate in.
of the nation of Israel and ultimately the birth of Jesus Christ. Today, our faith in Christ brings us into this line of God’s covenant people, which extends to all nations. Through Christ we become part of what N. T. Wright, the bishop of Durham, calls “the single, true, worldwide covenant family promised to Abraham.” So the story of our faith begins with the story of Abraham’s faith, just as God promised thousands of years ago.

Reading the whole Bible as one story of God gives a richness and depth to our understanding of not only His mission but also our place in it. Perhaps the idea of joining God in a purposeful mission is a new concept to you. It is for many people. For some people, though, the idea of faith in God, or salvation, is the idea of being saved from hell—a type of fire insurance, so to speak, protecting us from an eternity in hell but having little bearing on life here and now. But this isn’t the fullness of what the Bible teaches about God’s desire for relationship with us. Have you ever wondered why God doesn’t just take us to heaven after we are saved? The reason He doesn’t is exactly what we have been talking about. We have a purpose, beyond redemption, right here on the earth. God has established a kingdom right here, and we have the privilege of being a part of it. The work of Christ enables us to enter not only into a future life with God in heaven, but also into our current life with God as we go on mission with Him to people of all nations on earth. There are millions of hurting people who need God’s blessing, and we have an amazing opportunity to be vessels that God can use to bless others.

In their book *Adventures in Missing the Point*, Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo clarify through the following story the important idea that not only are we saved *from* something—eternity in hell—but we are saved *for* something—an amazing adventure on mission with God.

---

**The Parable of the Race**

by Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo

Excerpt from *Adventures in Missing the Point*

Consider the Parable of the Race. Once upon a time, in a land of boredom and drudgery, exciting news spread: “There is going to be a
race! And all who run this race will grow strong and they’ll never be bored again!” Exciting news like this had not been heard for many a year, for people experienced little adventure in this ho-hum land, beyond attending committee meetings, waiting in lines, sorting socks, and watching sitcom reruns.

Excitement grew as the day of the race drew near. Thousands gathered in the appointed town, at the appointed place. Most came to observe, skeptical about the news. “It’s too good to be true,” they said. “It’s just a silly rumor started by some teenaged troublemakers. But let’s stick around and see what happens anyway.”

Others could not resist the invitation, arriving in their running shorts and shoes. As they waited for the appointed time, they stretched and jogged in place and chattered among themselves with nervous excitement. At the appointed time they gathered at the starting line, heard the gun go off, and knew that it was time to run.

Then something very curious happened. The runners took a step or two or three across the starting line, and then abruptly stopped. One man fell to his knees, crying, “I have crossed the starting line! This is the happiest day of my life!” He repeated this again and again, and even began singing a song about how happy this day was for him.

Another woman started jumping for joy. “Yes!” she shouted, raising her fist in the air. “I am a race-runner! I am finally a race-runner!” She ran around jumping and dancing, getting and giving high fives to others who shared her joy at being in the race.

Several people formed a circle and prayed, quietly thanking God for the privilege of crossing the starting line, and thanking God that they were not like the skeptics who didn’t come dressed for the race.

An hour passed, and two. Spectators began muttering; some laughed. “So what do they think this race is?” they said. “Two or three strides, then a celebration? And why do they feel superior to us? They’re treating the starting line as if it were a finish line. They’ve completely missed the point.”

A few more minutes of this silliness passed. “You know,” a spectator said to the person next to her, “if they’re not going to run the race, maybe we should.”

“Why not? It’s getting boring watching them hang around just beyond the starting line. I’ve had enough boredom for one life.”

Others heard them, and soon many were kicking off their dress shoes, slipping out of their jackets, throwing all this unneeded clothing on
the grass. And they ran—past the praying huddles and past the crying individuals and past the jumping high-fivers. And they found hope and joy in every step, and they grew stronger with every mile and hill. To their surprise, the path never ended—because in this race, there was no finish line. So they were never bored again. (2003, 26–27)

The racers who were so delighted just to have entered the race are much like those who miss the important Bible truth that we are blessed to be a blessing. We are invited by God Himself to participate in the most important and exciting work we could possibly ever be a part of—in fact, what we were created for: blessing others out of the blessing we have received from Him. Think again of God’s invitation to Abraham. God didn’t say, “Sit back, Abraham, and watch me bless you.” He asked Abraham to follow Him, to trust His leading even when it didn’t make sense. By being willing to follow God, Abraham entered into a life of blessing that continues to have ramifications to this very moment in history. The gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ offers redemption and reconciliation with God, offers more than “fire insurance,” a protection from eternity without God. James Brownson and others write the following in StormFront: The Good News of God: “The biblical understanding of salvation is that our lives become swept up into something larger and greater than ourselves, into God’s purposes for the world.”
for the world” (2003, 34). We can choose not to fully join in, but then we are a lot like racers who dance around simply because they have crossed the starting line.

In the previous chapter, we looked at the relational heart of God and His purpose to redeem and reconcile us to a restored relationship with Him. But the Bible reveals that we are not invited solely into a “vertical” relationship with God. Through that vertical relationship with God, we are invited, enabled, and compelled to engage in a new level of “horizontal” relationship with people around us.

Our restored relationship with God is the means by which we can restore relationship with others around us. This is a weighty matter that is very different from what the world around us teaches and celebrates. Both the vertical and horizontal aspects of relationship demand time and effort to be cultivated. Consequently, relationship with God is something to be invested in with our whole being. This is clearly the heart of Jesus’ teaching, and it is particularly evident in Jesus’ response to a Pharisee’s question about the greatest commandment:

Jesus replied, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37–40)

First, observe that Jesus describes a full commitment to loving God—with our whole being, as it turns out. This command is a restatement of a command initially given to Israel thousands of years ago (Deuteronomy 6:5). Just as the Israelites lived in lands that were surrounded by pagan cultures in which the people worshipped many gods other than the one true God Yahweh, we too are surrounded by a culture whose people idolize other gods—wealth, celebrity, power, and a host of others—that are neither worthy of worship nor able to fulfill our needs. When this command was originally given, it was accompanied by instructions to surround oneself with discussion and reminders of God’s commands (Deuteronomy 6:6–9). This is an indication that God is fully aware of the many other things that compete for our time and energies, the things we are likely to worship and pursue besides Him.

Let’s look at the second part of Matthew 22:37–40. It is only through a love relationship with God in Christ that we can find
the ability to truly meet the second command Jesus mentions—to love our neighbors as ourselves. In establishing the nation of Israel, God never forgot other nations, nor did He intend for Israel to. Similarly, the New Testament parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) clearly shows Jesus’ teaching that mercy is to be freely distributed, regardless of nationality or other status. Although Jesus did focus a great deal of His attention on restoring the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 10:6), He didn’t overlook the opportunity to minister to those outside Israel as well, such as the Roman centurion who requested healing for his servant (Matthew 8:5–13), the Canaanite woman who had a demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21–28), and the Samaritan woman who found Living Water at the well (John 4:1–42). Of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus mark a turning point in the story of God’s mission to the nations, as God’s redemptive work erased lines of division between Gentile and Jew (Ephesians 2:14–22).

This kind of love—the kind that reaches across cultural, racial, economic, political, religious, and all other lines—is the love that flows from the heart of God, the love that enables redemption and reconciliation in our relationships with one another. Jesus spoke of this in John 13:34–35:

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” While this “new command” may not sound all that different from Jesus’ earlier command to “love your neighbor as yourself,” this one is different because in it Jesus includes Himself as a model for our love. In identifying His love as the standard—a kind of love that makes one willing to lay down his life for the benefit of others—Jesus expands our definition of loving others so that it is centered on the idea of sacrifice and mission. Verse 35 leaves no doubt that our love for one another is a testimony of Christ to those around us.

Another noteworthy facet to biblical teaching about our relationship with each other is the inclusion of information about the treatment of our enemies. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount includes the instruction to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44; see also Luke 6:27–36). Paul notes in Romans 5:10 that God reconciled us to Himself while we were His enemies, indicating that even “enemy status” cannot stand in the way of our extending love to another person. We, having been blessed by God
with the opportunity for redemption and reconciliation through Christ, must surely do no less than participate in blessing others. Just as was Abraham, we are blessed to be a blessing. Paul’s take on it is this: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

So, this is the type of race we are invited to run—not a celebration over simply crossing the starting line, but a full-on, unending adventure of following God and participating in His mission of reconciling the world to Himself. You are cordially invited on mission with the King of kings, Creator of the universe, to help lavish His goodness and gifts freely on a hurting and needy world. Along the way there will be more blessing than you can dream of.

Could there be a more exciting invitation?

Note

Big Idea
God invites us to participate in His purpose; He blesses us so that we can bless others.

Key Concepts
- Blessing from God is not just for us to enjoy, but for us to use to bless others.
- Blessing comes in many forms; it isn’t always what you think.
- Not only are we saved from something, but we are saved for something.
- Faith in God is what enables us to participate with God on His mission.
- As Christians, we stand in a line of faith that extends back to Abraham himself.

Reflective Questions
- What are some of the ways in which you are blessed? Do you see ways you can bless others out of the circumstances of your life? (SE p. 93)
- Are there hard circumstances in your life that you cannot possibly perceive as containing a blessing? Would you dare trust God to reveal to you His plan of blessing through those circumstances? (SE p. 93)
- Where are you on the proverbial racecourse mentioned in this chapter? Have you crossed the starting line? Are you jumping around, celebrating being a racer, but not taking a step farther? Are you running out the race? Do you need to be at a different point in your relationship with God? (SE p. 93)

Teacher’s Heart
I had a great deal of joy and anticipation in taking on the project of writing this course material. It has been an experience in which I have had to lean fully on the Lord’s provision. In the process, I have been so blessed to learn and understand more of God as I study and prepare for writing each chapter and lesson. But as much as that blessing of knowing Him more brings great joy to me, I was literally overwhelmed and brought to tears the day I finished writing the first chapter. It wasn’t so much that a deadline was met or even that we were finally moving forward on the work. No, I was filled with an almost unspeakable joy that God had chosen to use me to help communicate His love and heart to teenagers. I am so humbled to be asked to participate in His plan to proclaim Himself and His purpose to young people. What a tremendous blessing and joy it is to get to share God’s blessings with others. And it can be ours every day. God doesn’t desire for us to hoard the blessings He pours out on us. We are blessed in order to be a blessing. What joy that brings!

As you prepare to teach this chapter to your students, thank God for the opportunity to bless them through your teaching. Thank Him for allowing you to share your experiences, your love for Him, and your unique gifts with your students each day. What a privilege to serve such a great God, who allows us to participate in His work!
Teacher’s Preparation

Many of the concepts presented in chapter 3 may be new not only to your students but to you as well. You may wish to avail yourself of some of the additional reading resources in preparation for the next several lessons if you have questions that are not addressed in the lessons themselves. One of the first activities today gives students a chance to ask questions and discuss the Big Idea presented by the chapter. Keep in mind during the discussion that many of the concepts in the chapter are examined in more depth in this lesson and the next two. You may wish to wait until all the lessons have been presented before answering some of the questions your students ask. In today’s lesson we will be looking both at the concept of “blessing” as well as the top-line and bottom-line approach to reading the Bible.

A critical understanding for students to take away from this lesson is that blessings don’t always look as we expect or desire them to look. We are prone, both by nature and by cultural conditioning, to seek ease and comfort. It is not unusual for us to confuse want with need. Consequently our ideas of what constitutes a blessing are probably very narrow when compared with God’s definition. Some of your students are likely to define blessing in terms of “stuff,” happiness, and anything they would welcome into their lives. But the Bible shows us that sometimes blessing comes through trial, loss, and loneliness. Trusting and accepting the mysterious ways in which God works to bless us is a mark of spiritual maturity. Indeed, God’s love for us, fortunately, is not limited to our definitions of what would make us happy. That is not to say, however, that God doesn’t delight in bringing happiness to His children, but it is simply to remind us that His ways are not our ways (see Isaiah 55:8–9). Today, take the pulse of your students in terms of their understanding of the many dimensions of blessing. Then, as you guide them through the story of Abraham’s willingness to obey God’s command to sacrifice Isaac, help them see that even circumstances that we might not always describe as blessings can be used mightily, in the Lord’s hands, to bless. An example of this is found in the life of Joseph and in his ability to ultimately say to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20).

The lesson concludes with some guided practice of using the top-line/bottom-line approach to the Bible. **JE 9 Top Lines, Bottom Lines** is a template that will allow you to visually demonstrate this concept to your students. This tool helps us see that God’s blessings are tied to a larger purpose—the desire God has to bring about His plans, to increase His fame and reputation among the nations so that many will be united in relationship with Him. The top lines may contain blessings, but the bottom lines contain a vision of the purpose of God, His intentions, and His invitation to us to participate. The bottom lines call for response. They give us a vision that is larger than our immediate comfort and ease—they offer us a window into God’s far-reaching plans and our place in them. There is nothing wrong with top lines, but they are only part of the picture. Together, top lines and bottom lines paint the full picture of the purpose of God and His plans to bless us so that we might be a blessing to others. Ultimately, God seeks to have His plans for all nations fulfilled so that He might be glorified throughout the earth. Our blessings are merely a step on that path of purpose, not the destination. A goal of this part of the lesson is to begin to open students’ eyes to seeing both top lines and bottom lines in the Bible.

Objectives

• Students will describe their concept of “blessing.”
• Students will contrast their idea of blessing with a biblical view of blessing.
• Students will apply the top-line/bottom-line principle of Bible study to several passages.
Unpacking

Reading Quiz (5 minutes)

Using the following questions, quiz the students for a check of completion of the assigned reading:

1. What chapter of the Bible contains God’s initial promise to Abraham? (Genesis 12)

2. God’s promise to Abraham is sandwiched between a verse with a specific command and a specific ______. (act of obedience by Abraham)

3. What visual image of the future did God give to Abraham regarding His promise to give Abraham children? (the multitude of stars)

4. A ______ verse concerns a blessing that is promised or offered. (top-line)

5. A ______ verse concerns a responsibility or response that is required. (bottom-line)

Clarifying the Big Idea (5–10 minutes)

Draw the students’ attention to the Big Idea for chapter 3: God invites us to participate in His purpose; He blesses us so that we can bless others. Ask students whether they understand this concept through their reading, and give opportunity for questions about portions of the reading that may require additional clarification.

Blessing Unpacked (15 minutes)

On the board, write the brainstorming prompt “Blessing is …” and solicit student responses. Record student answers and examine them with the entire class. It is likely the majority of the list will contain items that lead to safety, ease, and comfort. Have someone read aloud James 1:2–4. Discuss the implications of this passage. Ask students to think of Bible stories that illustrate that God’s blessing sometimes comes through trials. If there’s time, direct students to complete JE 8 Abraham’s Diary Entry. This activity may need to be assigned as homework.

Finding the Bottom Lines (15 minutes)

Use JE 9 Top Lines, Bottom Lines as a guide for demonstrating how to identify top-line and bottom-line passages. You may also want to use Genesis 12:1–3 as an example with the class. Emphasize the locating of the bottom-line verses, since those verses have a big-picture orientation and often specifically state God’s intention to bless all nations. Have students look at Exodus 15:13–14, 1 Samuel 17:45–49, and Psalm 46:10–11 to identify the bottom-line portions and what they reveal about God’s purpose. (bottom lines: Exodus 15:14, 1 Samuel 17:46–47, Psalm 46:10)
If Time Activities

Passages Challenge
Challenge those students who tend to highlight or underline verses in their Bibles to examine the types of passages they have marked. Are more of the passages top-line verses or bottom-line verses? If your students are like many believers, there are more top lines highlighted. Discuss what this reveals about how the students view the Bible and their understanding of God.

Song Message Challenge
Challenge your students to begin the ongoing activity of identifying the emphasis (top-line or bottom-line) placed on the messages of contemporary Christian music and worship songs (those they hear on the radio or those they sing in their church or youth group). Have your students keep a log of the title and primary focus of the songs. Designate a day when this information will be discussed in class. Calculate and compare the percentage of songs whose primary message is top line and the percentage of those that include both. (You might be surprised by your findings!)

Extra Mile
A more in-depth alternative to the Blessing Unpacked activity is to have the students chart the story of Joseph told in Genesis 37–50, noting the various hardships in Joseph’s life and the blessings that each of these hardships brought. Students could take this project on individually or in small groups, completing diary entries for different points in Joseph’s life. Many other stories of the Bible lend themselves to an examination of the various sources of blessing God is able to use.

What’s Next

Journal Entry
Have your students do JE 8 Abraham’s Diary Entry if it was not completed in class.

Top-Line/Bottom-Line Practice
Provide your students with additional practice in finding top lines and bottom lines, using the following passages:

- 1 Kings 10:23–24 (top line: v. 23; bottom line: v. 24)
- Isaiah 61:9–11 (top line: v. 10; bottom lines: vv. 9 and 11)
- Daniel 6 (many top lines; main bottom lines: vv. 25–27)
- Matthew 10:18–20 (top lines: vv. 19–20; bottom line: v. 18)
- Luke 3:3–6 (top line: v. 5; bottom line: v. 6)
- Hebrews 5:8–10 (top line: v. 10; bottom lines: vv. 8–9)
ABRAHAM’S DIARY ENTRY

After reading Genesis 22:1–2, try to imagine the thoughts and feelings Abraham might have had toward God. Pretend that you’re Abraham and create a journal entry of those thoughts and feelings.

Now read Genesis 22:9–18. Create a journal entry for Abraham’s emotions and reactions to God’s withdrawal of the command to sacrifice Isaac and to the blessing God reaffirmed to Abraham.

Now think of a time when you have experienced something difficult that God either allowed in your life or specifically asked you to do. Create a journal entry that captures your reactions to that experience. Can you see any sort of blessing coming out of it? Did God use it as a way to mature your faith? as an example to others? to reveal something about Himself to you or those around you?
TOP LINES, BOTTOM LINES

Psalm 67 is a great example of the top-line and bottom-line principles of understanding the Bible. These principles provide a framework through which we can more clearly see the integrated purpose and plan of God through the pages of the Bible. Below you will find Psalm 67. Top-lines, in green, refer to blessings. The bottom lines, in orange, refer to God’s larger purpose of reaching all nations.

When you encounter a top-line blessing verse, look closer. There will often be a bottom-line verse nearby that reveals the larger picture. As has been mentioned during this study (top-line/bottom-line concept from Sjogren 1992), God’s purpose always connects the idea of blessing to the larger picture of reaching out to others through that blessing. Despite the term bottom line, these verses aren’t always found directly following the top-line blessing verse. But they are nearby in the passage somewhere. The entire psalm is marked below so that you can identify and see the relationship between top lines and bottom lines.

1. May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, Selah
2. that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.
3. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.
4. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth, Selah
5. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you.
6. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.
7. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Sometimes, as in verse 7, a single verse will contain both parts of the picture: “God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.” Note also the proportion of top lines to bottom lines: there are more bottom-line passages than top-line.

Look up the following passages and identify the top-line and bottom-line principles found there:

Exodus 15:13–14

1 Samuel 17:45–49

Psalm 46:10–11
The Faith of Abraham

Big Idea
God invites us to participate in His purpose; He blesses us so that we can bless others.

Key Concepts
- Blessing from God is not just for us to enjoy, but for us to use to bless others.
- Blessing comes in many forms; it isn’t always what you think.
- Not only are we saved from something, but we are saved for something.
- Faith in God is what enables us to participate with God on His mission.
- As Christians, we stand in a line of faith that extends back to Abraham himself.

Reflective Questions
- What are some of the ways in which you are blessed? Do you see ways you can bless others out of the circumstances of your life? (SE p. 93)
- Are there hard circumstances in your life that you cannot possibly perceive as containing a blessing? Would you dare trust God to reveal to you His plan of blessing through those circumstances? (SE p. 93)
- Where are you on the proverbial racecourse mentioned in this chapter? Have you crossed the starting line? Are you jumping around, celebrating being a racer, but not taking a step farther? Are you running out the race? Do you need to be at a different point in your relationship with God? (SE p. 93)

Teacher’s Heart
This morning I had the sad opportunity to lift up in prayer a family I know that is grieving the loss of a child. Again and again as I thought about this situation and prayed for the family members, I returned to the idea of the previous lesson: even the most difficult and trying situations can be vehicles for God’s blessing in some form. As I cried out to God on behalf of my friends, I knew that the peace I was praying for them to have in the midst of their pain is a difficult thing to imagine. But I know that God sees the whole picture. It takes great faith to trust God with what is unseen.

Great faith is one of the truths of the life of Abraham, who showed that it does take great faith to trust God with what is unseen. Similarly, today we are often called to trust God with matters we can’t see, understand, or control. But we can take comfort in knowing that the God who was faithful to His promise to Abraham is the same God who is faithful to His promise to us today. The person in whom Abraham placed His trust is our Abba Father, the Creator of the universe. May you and your students take great comfort today in the fact that the God of the ages is inviting us to walk intimately with Him so that all nations might be blessed.
Teacher’s Preparation

Often we think of everything from the time of Christ forward as the central message of the Bible that is relevant for today. Many of your students will have a good understanding of New Testament teaching about the gospel and God’s desires for the nations, but they may not have a very developed understanding of the Old Testament as a part of this same story. This limited viewpoint shortchanges our understanding of the greatness of God—a God who remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), a God who is fulfilling His long-established purpose. His love for the nations, as one can see from a search for the bottom-line truths of the Old Testament, was there from the beginning. His consistent and unrelenting pursuit of His purpose for His creation has been unfolding since the very earliest recorded events of the Bible. Even in Genesis 3 we find a foreshadowing of God’s triumph over the evil and death that seek to separate humankind from God. He told the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). The Bible is an epic story. And understanding its breadth and depth as one story of God’s universal redeeming love that reaches back to the very moment of our breach from God in the Garden of Eden gives us a breathtaking picture of His greatness.

Today’s lesson may feel different to you from any other so far in this course. The only activity for this lesson is a guided but open-ended discussion of the redemptive work that is at the heart of the story of the Bible, a redemptive work that began not with the Crucifixion but in the pages of Genesis. The idea of the gospel being something that is woven not only through the pages of the New Testament but throughout the Bible is perhaps a new concept to you. You should feel no pressure to guide your students to specific conclusions at this point; instead, think of this as an opportunity to introduce teaching that may take some time to fully develop in their minds and lives. This lesson seeks to give another lens through which to view the ongoing story of God. It offers another opportunity to dwell on the magnificent truths introduced in chapter 1.
both reveals God’s passion for the world and achieves God’s purpose for that world” (Guder 1998, 87).

• The word translated “gospel” as found in the Bible comes from the Greek words euaggelion (a noun) and euaggelizō (a verb), both of which have a root meaning “good news” or “good message.” Jesus announced the good news as the arrival of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14–15), which we will study further in the next chapter.

• Though the word gospel is found only in the New Testament, it was certainly a concept understood by Old Testament saints. The Hebrew basar is the equivalent to the Greek euaggelion or English gospel. This is the word found in verses such as Isaiah 52:7, which says, “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!’ ” Basar is also the word found in Isaiah 61:1–2, the same passage Jesus read at the synagogue in Nazareth and proclaimed fulfilled in Himself (Luke 4:16–21).

• As mentioned on SE pages 51 and 55, Paul describes God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–4 as a declaration of the “gospel in advance.” You may wish to read all of Galatians 3 to prepare for this lesson.

Justification by Faith

Students will rightly equate the idea of gospel with the concept of salvation or justification. In a nutshell, justification is a “new standing” with God by which we are restored to God’s favor. It is a verdict declared by God regarding man, just as an earthly judge would declare a verdict in a legal case. Paul writes in Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” Typically, ideas like this are thought of as New Testament concepts only, but the Bible has a “throughline” of thought on the role of faith in justification before God. Romans 4 outlines the roots of justification by faith going back to that pivotal encounter Abraham had with God. Reading Romans 4 together as a class might be a helpful part of your discussion in this lesson. Here are some additional considerations regarding the doctrine of justification by faith as a theme throughout the Bible:

• “The New Testament doctrine of justification is not an innovation; it is a truth already known in Old Testament times, and righteousness was obtained in the same manner in those days as in the New Testament dispensation,” notes theologian Henry C. Thiessen (1979, 277). “It is evident that the Old Testament saints were justified as well as the New Testament believers” (278).

• From the Matthew Henry Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible, written in the early eighteenth century, we see that the above sentiment is not that of contemporary scholars only. Commenting on Galatians 3:6–18, Matthew Henry notes, “This argument of the apostle’s may give us occasion to remark that justification by faith is no new doctrine, but what was established and taught in the church of God long before the times of the gospel. Yea, it is the only way wherein any sinners ever were, or can be, justified.”

For many of us, the idea of the mission of God to the nations has been taught to us as a primarily New Testament revelation. But as Christopher J. H. Wright notes, “The Old Testament presented YHWH as the God who wills to be known to the ends of the earth.” As your students worked through the top-line/bottom-line exercise in the previous lesson, they found Old Testament examples of this fact that Wright speaks of, and there are literally hundreds more. Far from believing that Jesus Christ brought something new in terms of the mission of God, we see that He fulfilled and extended something old—God’s promise to bless all nations through Abraham. Perhaps a truly shocking fact about the Bible is that Jesus’ contemporaries did recognize Jesus as YHWH. Wright notes that “people who knew YHWH, the Holy One of Israel, to be the God and that YHWH was transcendentally unique in all the rich dimensions of his scriptural identity, character and actions, constructed a careful, persistent, point-by-point identification of Jesus of Nazareth with this same YHWH” (2006, 106). It is perhaps not easy for us as believers in the resurrected Christ to remember that He is this same YHWH we first meet in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ is the same God, YHWH, who called Abraham to a covenantal, set-apart life of promise. Abraham’s response
to God in faith resulted in not only Abraham's justification before God but the opportunity for your justification before God. Genesis 15:6 tells us, “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” Abraham's faith is affirmed in other places in the Bible, such as Romans 4:3, 17–22; Galatians 3:6; and Hebrews 11:8–10; and each time we are told that Abraham placed his faith in God. As believers, we place our faith in Jesus Christ, who is God; and this truth leads us into the next section on the Trinity.

**Thoughts on the Trinity**

Our faith is in the same thing that Abraham placed his faith in—the Creator, God of the universe, the indivisible Three-in-One. Paul understood and explained in his letter to the predominantly Gentile church at Rome that all believers in Christ are in the spiritual family of Abraham: “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were” (Romans 4:16–17). And again, Paul affirms this: “Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). As mysterious as the concept of the Trinity is, it is one worth pondering and holding on to, for it provides deeper understanding of the epic story of the Bible and the magnificence of the God whose story it is. What a long and storied line of faith we stand in as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. And just as Abraham's life was called out to be a blessing to all nations, so we are called to be set apart to bless the nations with our lives in Christ.

**Objectives**

- Students will examine the nature of Abraham's faith and compare it with their own.
- Students will integrate (or relate) their understanding of the gospel of the New Testament with the faith of Abraham in the Old Testament.
- Students will assess the continuity of the story of the Bible.
- Students will identify their relationship to Abraham as an heir.

**Unpacking**

**Defining the Gospel (10–15 minutes)**

Ask students to define *gospel*. Keep a list of responses on the board to point out the variety of responses defining this concept. Discuss any themes that emerge, and tie them to the points made in the “Teacher's Preparation” section under “The Gospel” heading.

**Discussing the Gospel (30–35 minutes)**

Use the material in the “Teacher's Preparation” section as a guide to lead students in discussing the gospel, the biblical concept of justification, and the unity of the story of the Bible and God’s purpose. Some questions that might guide your discussion include the following:

- What is the gospel? Is the gospel found in the Old Testament?
- What did Paul mean in Galatians 3:8 about the “gospel in advance”?
- What did Abraham’s faith result in? Who did Abraham place his faith in? What is the relationship between the object of Abraham's faith and the object of your faith?
- What does the song “Father Abraham” really affirm? What difference does it make to understand that you are an heir of Abraham?
What's Next

Have your students write a journal entry, **JE 10 Reflection on the Lesson**, in which they react to what they learned in today’s class discussion. Have them record any questions they have and instruct them to make a plan to find the answers.

In preparation for class discussion in the next lesson, ask your students to reread “The Parable of the Race” and to respond to the questions (**JE 11 “The Parable of the Race”**).

Further Study


Notes

4. Strong, s.v. "basar"; Gilbertson, s.v. "basar."
Journal Entry

Reflection on the Lesson

Write a response to the things you discussed and learned today's lesson. Write down any questions you have and list an idea about where or how to find the answers to them.
"THE PARABLE OF THE RACE"

From Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo’s Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel.

Consider the Parable of the Race. Once upon a time, in a land of boredom and drudgery, exciting news spread: “There is going to be a race! And all who run this race will get strong and they’ll never be bored again!” Exciting news like this had not been heard for many a year, for people experienced little adventure in this ho-hum land, beyond attending committee meetings, waiting in lines, sorting mail, and watching sitcom reruns.

Excitement grew as the day of the race drew near. Thousands gathered in the appointed town, at the appointed place. Most came to observe, skeptical about the news. “It’s too good to be true,” they said. “It’s just a silly rumor started by some teenaged troublemakers. But let’s stick around and see what happens anyway.”

Others could not resist the invitation, arriving in their running shorts and shoes. As they waited for the appointed time, they stretched and jogged in place and chattered among themselves with nervous excitement. At the appointed time they gathered at the starting line, heard the gun go off, and knew that it was time to run.

Then something very curious happened. The runners took a step or two or three across the starting line, and then abruptly stopped. One man fell to his knees, crying, “I have crossed the starting line! This is the happiest day of my life!” He repeated this again and again, and even began singing a song about how happy this day was for him.

Another woman started jumping for joy. “Yes!” she shouted, raising her fist in the air. “I am a race-runner! I am finally a race-runner!” She ran around jumping and dancing, getting and giving high fives to others who shared her joy at being in the race.

Several people formed a circle and prayed, quietly thanking God for the privilege of crossing the starting line, and thanking God that they were not like the skeptics who didn’t come dressed for the race.

An hour passed, and two. Spectators began muttering; some laughed. “So what do they think this race is?” they said. “Two or three strides, then a celebration? And why do they feel superior to us? They’re treating the starting line as if it were a finish line. They’ve completely missed the point.”

A few more minutes of this silliness passed. “You know,” a spectator said to the person next to her, “if they’re not going to run the race, maybe we should.”

“Why not? It’s getting boring watching them hang around just beyond the starting line. I’ve had enough boredom for one life.”

Others heard them, and soon many were kicking off their dress shoes, slipping out of their jackets, throwing all this unneeded clothing on the grass. And they ran—past the praying huddles and past the crying individuals and past the jumping high-fivers. And they found hope and joy in every step, and they grew stronger with every mile and hill. To their surprise, the path never ended—because in this race, there was no finish line. So they were never bored again. (2003, 26–27)

Which part of the parable resonates most with you? Why do you think that is?

What do you believe is the overall message of this parable?

Explain the following statement in relation to missio Dei: “Not only are we saved from something, but we are saved for something.”
Big Idea
God invites us to participate in His purpose; He blesses us so that we can bless others.

Key Concepts
• Blessing from God is not just for us to enjoy, but for us to use to bless others.
• Blessing comes in many forms; it isn’t always what you think.
• Not only are we saved from something, but we are saved for something.
• Faith in God is what enables us to participate with God on His mission.
• As Christians, we stand in a line of faith that extends back to Abraham himself.

Reflective Questions
• What are some of the ways in which you are blessed? Do you see ways you can bless others out of the circumstances of your life? (SE p. 93)
• Are there hard circumstances in your life that you cannot possibly perceive as containing a blessing? Would you dare trust God to reveal to you His plan of blessing through those circumstances? (SE p. 93)
• Where are you on the proverbial racecourse mentioned in this chapter? Have you crossed the starting line? Are you jumping around, celebrating being a racer, but not taking a step farther? Are you running out the race? Do you need to be at a different point in your relationship with God? (SE p. 93)

Teacher’s Heart
A great Christian folk song called Pass It On (written by Kurt Kaiser, Bud John Songs, 1969) talks about how it takes only a spark to start a fire that will warm everyone around it. The song compares that concept to what happens when someone experiences God’s love and then spreads it on to everyone else. The idea captured in this simple song is the same idea as our calling to join God’s mission to the world. We have been blessed with the love of God so that we in turn can bless others. As you prepare to challenge your students with this call today, pray that God would show you how to model this concept to your students. Ask also for insight into ways you can encourage this outlook and practice in their lives.

Teacher’s Preparation
Since the previous lesson was fairly deep and theological, here’s some lighthearted teaching to brighten your day. Let’s consider some pet theology that conveys the differences between cats and dogs:

A dog says, “You pet me, you feed me, you shelter me, you love me, you must be God.”
A cat says, “You pet me, you feed me, you shelter me, you love me, I must be God.”
(Sjogren and Robison 2003, back cover)
Are you smiling? If you have ever spent any time around a cat, you probably are. We all know that dogs and cats can have quite opposite personalities. Bob Sjogren and Gerald Robison, authors of _Cat and Dog Theology_ (2003) propose that Christians can find themselves in one of two camps—dog theology, which is focused on God and His plans, or cat “me-ology,” which is focused on self and one’s own plans. Bob Sjogren notes, “Although most Christians say, ‘God is the main character of the Bible,’ they live and act as if _they_ are the main character. Cats basically focus on _themselves_ in their Christianity. Dogs basically focus on _God_ in their Christianity” (2000, 6; words in italics inserted). This is just another way of thinking about the concepts we have been talking about in this course. “Cats” and “dogs” are also found in “The Parable of the Race” (McLaren and Campolo 2003, 26–27) on SE pages 56–58. Notice that cats and dogs, as described above, both represent Christians, just as the people who cross the starting line in the parable are all Christians. The difference is in their orientation toward God. The racers who just step over the starting line and celebrate are a lot like cats. Those spectators who join the race to run it out are a lot like dogs. The activities in today’s lesson will use both “The Parable of the Race” and the concept of cat and dog theology to challenge students to evaluate their own orientation toward God, the blessings of God, and the invitation to participate on mission with Him.

### Objectives

- Students will examine “The Parable of the Race” to identify the various analogies present in it.
- Students will identify the things they consider to be blessings in their lives.
- Students will identify which of their blessings they use to bless others.
- Students will construct an application plan detailing two steps they could take to enact the idea of “blessed to be a blessing.”

### Unpacking

#### Cats and Dogs (5 minutes)

Have students look at _JE 12 Cat and Dog Theology_. Point out the differences between cat theology and dog theology. Discuss reactions and conclude by pointing out that we should aspire to have dog theology.

#### Parable Study (15–20 minutes)

Put students in small groups and give them the task of completing the identification analogies found in _BLM 3.1 Unpacking “The Parable of the Race.”_ Groups should be prepared to present their answers to the class. (See possible answers in the answer key, _BLM 3.1K_.)

Students should also discuss their responses to the following questions from _JE 11 “The Parable of the Race”_ that they completed before class:

1. Which part of the parable resonates most with you? Why do you think that is?
2. What do you believe is the overall message of this parable?
3. Explain the following statement in relation to _missio Dei_: “Not only are we saved _from_ something, but we are saved _for_ something.”
Inflow/Outflow Examination (15–20 minutes)
Spend a few minutes reviewing the idea of blessing. Remind students that blessings can be not only material possessions, but also gifts and talents, things they enjoy, relationships, and even difficult circumstances. Then have students individually work through the inventories in JE 13 Inflow/Outflow Inventory.

If Time Activity
Ask students to share some of the results from their completed inventories of inflow and outflow of blessings. Give students the opportunity to encourage classmates by having the students write or speak about ways they have seen their classmates bless others. Lead in a time of prayer for students and yourself, asking for enlightenment about ways to share our blessings.

What’s Next
Journal Entry Examination
Challenge students to spend some time prayerfully examining their completed JE 13. Have them create an application plan that lists at least two ways they might be able to bless others by using some of the blessings they identified.

Reading
Have students read chapter 4 in preparation for the next lesson.
Unpacking “The Parable of the Race”

Consider the Parable of the Race. Once upon a time, in a land of boredom and drudgery, exciting news spread: “There is going to be a race! And all who run this race will grow strong and they’ll never be bored again!” Exciting news like this had not been heard for many a year, for people experienced little adventure in this ho-hum land, beyond attending committee meetings, waiting in lines, sorting socks, and watching sitcom reruns.

Excitement grew as the day of the race drew near. Thousands gathered in the appointed town, at the appointed place. Most came to observe, skeptical about the news. “It’s too good to be true,” they said. “It’s just a silly rumor started by some teenaged troublemakers. But let’s stick around and see what happens anyway.”

Others could not resist the invitation, arriving in their running shorts and shoes. As they waited for the appointed time, they stretched and jogged in place and chattered among themselves with nervous excitement. At the appointed time they gathered at the starting line, heard the gun go off, and knew that it was time to run.

Then something very curious happened. The runners took a step or two or three across the starting line, and then abruptly stopped. One man fell to his knees, crying, “I have crossed the starting line! This is the happiest day of my life!” He repeated this again and again, and even began singing a song about how happy this day was for him.

Another woman started jumping for joy. “Yes!” she shouted, raising her fist in the air. “I am a race-runner! I am finally a race-runner!” She ran around jumping and dancing, getting and giving high fives to others who shared her joy at being in the race.

Several people formed a circle and prayed, quietly thanking God for the privilege of crossing the starting line, and thanking God that they were not like the skeptics who didn’t come dressed for the race.

An hour passed, and two. Spectators began muttering; some laughed. “So what do they think this race is?” they said. “Two or three strides, then a celebration? And why do they feel superior to us? They’re treating the starting line as if it were a finish line. They’ve completely missed the point.”

A few more minutes of this silliness passed. “You know,” a spectator said to the person next to her, “if they’re not going to run the race, maybe we should.”

“Why not? It’s getting boring watching them hang around just beyond the starting line. I’ve had enough boredom for one life.”

Others heard them, and soon many were kicking off their dress shoes, slipping out of their jackets, throwing all this unneeded clothing on the grass. And they ran—past the praying huddles and past the crying individuals and past the jumping high-fivers. And they found hope and joy in every step, and they grew stronger with every mile and hill. To their surprise, the path never ended—because in this race, there was no finish line. So they were never bored again. (2003, 26–27)

A. After reading “The Parable of the Race,” compare the components of the parable with contemporary life by completing the following analogy questions. You may have multiple answers for some questions.

1. The race is analogous to ________________________________.

2. Those that “could not resist the invitation, arriving in their running shorts and shoes,” are analogous to _________________________________.


3. Those that “came to observe, skeptical about the news,” are analogous to ____________________________.

4. The racers who crossed the starting line and then stopped to sing, rejoice, or pray thankful prayers are analogous to ____________________________.

5. The skeptics who got tired of watching and decided to run the race themselves are analogous to ____________________________

B. Now consider the following questions:

1. What is the significance of describing the land as “ho-hum” and a land of “boredom and drudgery”?

2. What do you think the spectators’ question, “And why do they feel superior to us?” is a reference to?

3. What process is described by the following: “And they found hope and joy in every step, and they grew stronger with every mile and hill”?

C. Considering the parable alongside the idea of cat and dog theology, complete the following analogies:

1. Cat theology : God :: _____________________________________________ : the race

2. Dog theology : God :: _____________________________________________ : the race
CAT AND DOG THEOLOGY

Journal Entry 12

Which camp of Christians do you identify with?

YOU PET ME, YOU FEED ME, YOU SHELTER ME, YOU LOVE ME, YOU MUST BE GOD.

You pet me, you feed me, you shelter me, you love me, I must be God.

Image captions from Bob Sjogren's Notes for "Cat and Dog Theology" on DVD (2000, 3) and from Bob Sjogren and Gerald Robinson's Cat and Dog Theology (2003, back cover).
INFLOW/OUTFLOW INVENTORY

Chapter 2 closed with the following sentence: “We have both an intake and an outflow capacity when it comes to God’s gifts to us.” This is another way of saying that we are blessed in order to be a blessing to others. Use the space below to consider both the inflow of blessings from God into your life, and the outflow of those blessings to people around you.

Think again of the theologies of cats and dogs. “Cat theology” is self-centered, focusing on how one can be blessed, protected, and cared for by God. “Dog theology” is God-centered, focusing on how one can please, serve, and glorify God (Sjogren 2000). What relationship do you see between cat and dog theology and the results of the exercise you just completed?
Other resources from Purposeful Design Publications ...

**Science** (Levels 1–6)

**Health** (Middle and High School)

**Bible** (Preschool–Grade 6)

**Literature** (Grades 3–12)

**Mathematics** (Grades K–8)

---

Your best option

800-367-0798

www.purposefuldesign.com