

2025
WHFMS
Program Kit



"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

Contents

Count Your Blessings (Welcome Letter) Karen Hall	1
Gratitude Cheryl Harris	3
Jesus' Gratitude Verna Qualls	6
Other's Gratitude LaGrange WHFMS	15
Your Gratitude (Week of Prayer) Pat Havener	18
Joy Cheryl Harris	27
Jesus' Joy (Installation Service) Karen Hall.....	30
Other's Joy (Evangelism Emphasis, Women's Sunday) Jan Hendrickson, Cheryl Harris	32
Grace Cheryl Harris	39
Other's Grace (Mission Emphasis) Karen Hall.....	43
Your Grace — With a New Master! Sue Oberdier.....	47

Count Your Blessings

WHFMS Program Kit 2025

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2025 WHFMS Program Kit



Dear Friends,

Count your blessings. How many times have we heard this phrase or said it ourselves? Sometimes we use it when we are so amazed at what the Lord has done for us. Other times, we say this during the hard times. The truth is there is never a wrong time to count our blessings.

When the Central, Eastern and Western Region women decided to choose this theme for 2025 we were excited about the possibilities. There are so many verses that tell us to be thankful. Our theme verse tells us why we should count our blessings: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). Pleasures forevermore is a wonderful promise! Forevermore means now and in the future. Forevermore says the pleasures are never-ending. Our programs for 2025 will be focusing on these pleasures.

I wrote this letter to you in October 2023. As I look out my windows from my home at the Advent Christian Village, we are still recovering from Hurricane Idalia. The Village took a direct hit from this category 3 storm. After the storm, we were so thankful that there were no deaths or injuries, despite the extensive damage that was everywhere. As the days and weeks went on without power, water and cell service, our patience was tried. Our relief turned to weariness. We were still so thankful there had been no loss of life, but we wanted our lives to go back to normal! By the time you read this letter, the storm will be a memory and hopefully, all the damage will have been repaired.

Why do I share this memory now? During the September Florida heat of 2023, I have to admit I was not always counting my blessings. When I drove by homes that were virtually destroyed and saw tarps on the majority of buildings and beautiful trees decimated, I was not expressing thanksgiving, but despair. I do not think I am that different from most of you. There are times in our lives when counting our blessings is hard!

That is one reason I am looking forward to these programs. I want to do as Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” No matter what, I want to be counting my blessings. God is faithful. His love endures forever. I need to learn that these promises are enough. Together we will be reminded of these truths.

Enjoy “Counting Your Blessings.” As you go through the year, please share your thoughts with me. We will share them in the WHFMS Update and together we will be encouraged.

I appreciate you and most definitely count each of you as a wonderful blessing.

In His Service,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Hall".

Karen Hall
National WHFMS President

Gratitude

Cheryl Harris

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 100:1-5

PREPARATION: This program is designed to help groups discuss and learn about the biblical concept of gratitude. Before others arrive, prepare enough copies of the word list to make sure each leader has one to keep track of which her group has solved. Make sure you have enough Bibles for each person.

MUSIC SUGGESTIONS: If you want music in your meeting, the following are several ideas if you have access to the music and lyrics: “Give Thanks” (Hymns of Heritage and Hope #94), “O Worship the King” (HoH&H #106), “Jesus, Friend of Sinners” by Matthew West, “Give of Your Best to the Master” by Howard B. Grose, and “Thank You, Lord” by Don Moen and Paul Baloche.

Jesus (Hook - Introduction)

Leader, below are the instructions for a game to begin the lesson.

SAY: We are going to start with a game called “Word Relay.”

WORD RELAY GAME

PREPARATION: To start, divide the group into teams. Prepare a copy of the word list for each team for the leaders to keep track of their progress.

WORD LIST: joyful, noise, serve, gladness, singing, people, sheep, pasture, enter, gate, thanks, him, name, generations

DIRECTIONS FOR GAME PLAY: Explain to all: This game is a cross between telephone and charades, except that only one word will be shared, and the person must act it out (like charades) for their team to guess (instead of whispering). One member from each team will come to the leader, who will whisper the first word into her ear and return them to the group to act it out. Once a member of the group guesses the word correctly, someone new from the group will come to the leader for the next word. The team that finishes the list first wins.

VARIATION: If there aren't enough people to make teams, have each person in order act out a word until the list is finished. The person who acts out the most correct guesses wins.

Others (Look & Book- Bible lesson)

Jewish temple history tells us that Psalm 100 was to be sung with the Jewish thank-offerings, but it is just as meaningful for the gospel church. It is with good reason that many sing this psalm frequently, for it expresses joy, gratitude and love for God. The way to enter into his courts is through the gate of thanksgiving. Throughout church history, Christians (and Jews before them) have been taking psalms and putting them to music so they can be sung in worship. One of the most famous of all the psalm songs is Psalm 100. It was paraphrased into a hymn during the Reformation period and first appeared in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of 1561. The pilgrims in America titled this psalm “The Old Hundredth” in their songbook, and it was sung to the music most modern Christians call the doxology. For all we know it was sung at the very first Thanksgiving. How appropriate a song for a study on gratitude!

READ: Psalm 100

ASK: Why and in what ways do you find songs are effective in praising God? (100:2. Answers will be personal opinions.)

ASK: Why are joy and gladness vital in worshiping God? (100:1-2)

ASK: Why is it important to come to God with thanksgiving? (100:4)

You (Took - Application)

ASK: What do you do for entertainment? (Allow participants time to share.)

Many people today are obsessed with entertainment: building homes around audio, game or video centers and their social lives around entertainment events. People are consumed with images, sounds and thoughts from television, movies, books, magazines, music and games. Some of these are positive influences while others are filled with immorality, brutality, pornography and all kinds of evil in the name of entertainment. When we prioritize our relationship with God, our choice is clear, and we will guard their lives by not intentionally viewing, listening to and thinking about anything that might grieve the Holy Spirit.

ASK: How can we apply the wisdom from this psalm?

Some ideas include:

- As a group and/or individuals, spend time giving God thanks for as many things as you can that come to mind today. This can be done as a concert of praise or by making a group list, and then praising God together in prayer.
- Discuss making changes in activities or lifestyle to avoid watching or doing things that could corrupt your mind and spirit and cause you to have ungodly or impure thoughts. This may mean getting rid of some materials, media or entertainment items.

Close in prayer together:

- Ask Jesus to help you avoid watching or getting involved in things that could corrupt your mind and spirit.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize and seize opportunities to share Christ's message and influence others for Jesus.

WRITTEN BY: Cheryl Harris (whach@cheerful.com). Cheryl lives in a trailer in the woods of Ashland, Maine with her husband Bill, their dog Daisy and cats Doria and Ariel. Having retired from pastoring (Yes, God?), the couple work in local schools.

Jesus' Gratitude

Verna Qualls

SCRIPTURE: Luke 22:17-19 or Matthew 26:26-27

PREPARATION: The purpose of this program is to explore when and how Jesus demonstrated gratitude to deepen our understanding of what it means to be grateful.

MUSIC SUGGESTION: If you are interested in having music in your meeting and have access to the music and lyrics, the following songs are recommended: "Give Thanks" (Hymns of Heritage & Hope #94), "Thank You, Lord" by Don Moen & Paul Baloche and "Give of Your Best to The Master" by Howard B. Grose.

Jesus (Hook)

Mad Gab! by Sane Gab game

Mad Gab is a game where even winners sound like losers. Players take turns translating as many Mad Gabs as they can in five minutes.

Directions to Leader: Leader, you need to decide if you want individuals to work alone, or if those present will split into teams and work together. You can also split the clues into several lists if you'd like to save time. The groups would each work on a separate list. When the time is called, they would swap lists. If you do it this way, make sure the groups have different colored writing utensils to tell who got what.

To start, either write the following quote where all can see to read it or make copies for all present. Practice saying it together until someone shares the correct words.

SAY THIS OUT LOUD: "Itsy Citing Foe Wall."

ASK: What did you say? (It's exciting for all.)

- Before we get started, some Pro Tips: The phrases must be spoken out loud and listened to.
- Answers are case insensitive. Pay no attention to capital or small letters.
- Unanswered questions go to the next player.
- The leader determines when a guesser gets it.

Let's Play!

Player/Team 1 goes first, writing down their answers. Other players should remain quiet. If you are playing teams, each team can work together on a different list. After 5 minutes is up, players/teams should swap lists.

MAD GABS #1

1. Abe Nun Appeal
2. Ace Life Ox
3. Aim Meek Rant
4. Ape Hand Dub Hair
5. Ape Haul Oath Hurt Dean
6. Assess Seam Ease Heed
7. Bay Beach Ham Pooh

CLUES

a fruit
 a smart animal
 Christian singer
 an Asian animal
 space movie
 part of a Big Mac
 bathroom need

MAD GABS #2

8. Bet Turf Oar Kit It
9. Boat Hock Sin Check Shuns
10. Caress Peak Reamed Hone Huts
11. Chest Hey Kitty See
12. Chest Jew Wade Aim In It
13. Choke late Die Scream
14. Chore His Sick Perk

CLUES

advice
 facial adjustment
 brand name breakfast
 command
 command
 food
 movie title

MAD GABS #3

15. Come Pew Turf High Russ
16. Condo Leaser Ice
17. Mom Stirs Sink
18. Dawn Alt South Hurl Hand
19. Day Demand Wall Kink
20. Debts Heaven Dish Hoe
21. Dock Terse Ooze

CLUES

technology problem
 political figure
 movies
 Canadian actor
 1995 crime movie
 television show
 author

MAD GABS #4

22. Doe Judge A Boo K Bye Discover
23. Doll May Shuns
24. Eggs Hearse Sized Hay Lee
25. Eight Hey Blanch Hair
26. Elf Habits Hoop
27. Eyed Rink Gay Tour Eight
28. Four Ghetto Fur

CLUES

idiom
 dogs
 doctor's advice
 furniture
 kid's food
 advertisement
 slang demand

MAD GABS #5

29. Git Read He Fort Hey Cough
30. Hen Reef Honda

CLUES

heard on a plane
 American actor

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 31. Her She's Chalk Lit Par | candy bar |
| 32. Hopper Tune Hit Teen Ox | positive statement |
| 33. Jar Lease Ain't Gels | television show |
| 34. Jaw Knee App Bulls Heed | American legend |
| 35. June Your Ice Cool | education level |

MAD GABS #6

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 36. Kenya Ear Mean How | advertisement question |
| 37. Lie Cave Urchin | 80's song title |
| 38. My Cull Chore Den | basketball legend |
| 39. Hi Hand Rye | idiom |
| 40. Hook Keys Anchor Ream | dessert flavor |
| 41. Hype Peeb Earth Hey | conversational phrase |
| 42. Ladle Rat Rotten Hoot | book |

CLUES

MAD GABS #7

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 43. Lass Twill Ant Taste A Mint | legal document |
| 44. Law Duff There Inks | movie title |
| 45. Made Divorce Pea Whiff Ewe | movie quote |
| 46. Gnome Ore Deers | shampoo or Ozzy song |
| 47. Oak An A Duh | country's anthem |
| 48. Of Lions Quarrel | a small animal |
| 49. Owe Forth Account Her Rug | medication |

CLUES

MAD GABS #8

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 50. Pie Rate Softy Care Hip Been | movie title |
| 51. Pry Fat Bench A Man | Goldie Hawn movie |
| 52. Rome He Owe Hand Jewelry Yet | play |
| 53. Run Hazel Wig Her | American actress |
| 54. Saw Fast Abe Abie Spot Hum | comparative description |
| 55. Sell Your Laugh Hone | technology device |
| 56. Sheik Cans Hoop Fur Thistle | book |

CLUES

MAD GABS #9

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 57. Shook Hurl His Scum | diabetic treat |
| 58. Son Knees Hide Hup | cook an egg |
| 59. Spike Ids | movie title |
| 60. Theme Hiss Single Ink | 2019 movie |
| 61. Tote Hall Reek Hall | movie title |
| 62. Verge in Ollie Foil | frying Need |

CLUES

63. Wands Up Pawn Eight I'm start of a fairy tale

MAD GABS #10

64. Weed Owns Tan Ditch Ants

65. Whole League How

66. Why Tell If Hunt

67. Wreck You Lure Hoard The Cafe?

68. Yang Keyed Ooh Dealt Andy

69. Yule Height Dub Mile I've

70. Zola Reek Lips

CLUES

defeated statement

conversational phrase

a large animal

heard ordering coffee

patriotic song

Debby Boone song

sky event

ANSWERS

MAD GABS #1

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
1. Abe Nun Appeal	a fruit	a banana peel
2. Ace Life Ox	a smart animal	a sly fox
3. Aim Meek Rant	Christian singer	Amy Grant
4. Ape Hand Dub Hair	an Asian animal	a panda bear
5. Ape Haul Oath Hurt Dean	space movie	"Apollo 13"
6. Assess Seam Ease Heed	part of a Big Mac	a sesame seed
7. Bay Beach Ham Pooh	bathroom need	baby shampoo

MAD GABS #2

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
8. Bet Turf Oar Kit It	advice	"Better forget it."
9. Boat Hock Sin Check Shuns	facial adjustment	botox injections
10. Caress Peak Reamed Hone Huts	brand name breakfast	Krispy Kreme donuts
11. Chest Hey Kitty See	command	"Just take it easy."
12. Chest Jew Wade Aim In It	command	"Just you wait a minute."
13. Choke late Die Scream	food	chocolate ice cream
14. Chore His Sick Perk	movie title	Jurassic Park

MAD GABS #3

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
15. Come Pew Turf High Russ	technology problem	computer virus
16. Condo Leaser Ice	political figure	Condoleezza Rice

17. Mom Stirs Sink	movies	"Monsters Inc."
18. Dawn Alt South Hurl Hand	Canadian actor	Donald Sutherland
19. Day Demand Wall Kink	1995 crime movie	"Dead Man Walking"
20. Debts Heaven Dish Hoe	television show	"That 70s Show"
21. Dock Terse Ooze	author	Dr. Seuss

MAD GABS #4

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
22. Doe Judge A Book Bye Discover	idiom	Don't judge a book by its cover.
23. Doll May Shuns	dogs	dalmatians
24. Eggs Hearse Sized Hay Lee	doctor's advice	Exercise daily.
25. Eight Hey Blanch Hair	furniture	a table and chair
26. Elf Habits Hoop	kid's food	alphabet soup
27. Eyed Rink Gay Tour Eight	advertisement	"I drink Gator Ade."
28. Four Ghetto Fur	slang demand	"Fork it over."

MAD GABS #5

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
29. Git Read He Fort Hey Cough	heard on a plane	"Get ready for takeoff."
30. Hen Reef Honda	American actor	Henry Fonda
31. Her She's Chalk Lit Par	candy bar	Hershey's chocolate bar
32. Hopper Tune Hit Teen Ox	positive statement	"Opportunity knocks."
33. Jar Lease Ain't Gels	television show	"Charlie's Angels"
34. Jaw Knee App Bulls Heed	American legend	Johnny Appleseed
35. June Your Ice Cool	education level	Junior High School

MAD GABS #6

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
36. Kenya Ear Mean How	advertisement question	"Can you hear me now?"
37. Lie Cave Urchin	80's song title	"Like a Virgin"
38. My Cull Chore Den `	basketball legend	Michael Jordan
39. Hi Hand Rye	idiom	high and dry
40. Hook Keys Anchor Ream	dessert flavor	cookies and cream

41. Hype Peeb Earth Hey	conversational phrase	Happy Birthday
42. Ladle Rat Rotten Hoot	book	"Little Red Riding Hood"

MAD GABS #7

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
43. Lass Twill Ant Taste A Mint	legal document	last will and testament
44. Law Duff There Inks	movie title	"Lord of the Rings"
45. Made Divorce Pea Whiff Ewe	movie quote	"May the force be with you."
46. Gnome Ore Deers	shampoo or Ozzy song	"No More Tears"
47. Oak An A Duh	country's anthem	"O Canada"
48. Of Lions Quarrel	a small animal	a flying squirrel
49. Owe Forth Account Her Rug	medication	over-the-counter drug

MAD GABS #8

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
50. Pie Rate Softy Care Hip Been	movie title	"Pirates of the Caribbean"
51. Pry Fat Bench A Man	Goldie Hawn movie	"Private Benjamin"
52. Rome He Owe Hand Jewelry Yet	play	"Romeo and Juliet"
53. Run Hazel Wig Her	American actress	Renee Zellweger
54. Saw Fast Abe Abie Spot Hum	comparative description	Soft as a baby's bottom
55. Sell Your Laugh Hone	technology device	cellular phone
56. Sheik Cans Hoop Fur Thistle	book	<u>Chicken Soup for the Soul</u>

MAD GABS #9 CLUES ANSWERS

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
57. Shook Hurl His Scum	diabetic treat	sugarless gum
58. Son Knees Hide Hup	cook an egg	sunny side up
59. Spike Ids	movie title	"Spy Kids"
60. Theme Hiss Single Ink	2019 movie	"The Missing Link"
61. Tote Hall Reek Hall	movie title	"Total Recall"
62. Verge in Ollie Foil	frying Need	virgin olive oil
63. Wands Up Pawn Eight I'm	start of a fairy tale	"Once Upon A Time..."

CLUES	HINTS	ANSWERS
64. Weed Owns Tan Ditch Ants `	defeated statement	"We don't stand a chance."
65. Whole League How	conversational phrase	"Holy Cow!"
66. Why Tell If Hunt	a large animal	white elephant
67. Wreck You Lure Hoard The Cafe?	heard ordering coffee	Regular or decaf?
68. Yang Keyed Ooh Dealt Andy	patriotic song	"Yankee Doodle Dandy"
69. Yule Height Dub Mile I've	Debby Boone song	"You Light up My Life"
70. Zola Reek Lips	sky event	solar eclipse

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

Let's think about commitments.

ASK: What kinds of commitments do you know about or are involved in, currently or in the past? (Allow time for answers to be shared.)

A contract is a legal agreement with another party, outlining specific benefits, obligations and potential penalties for both sides.

ASK: Have you ever signed a contract? (Allow time for discussion about marriage licenses, business contracts, mortgage agreements and such.)

We sign contracts when we buy a new car or house or when we agree to marriages or wills. To initiate the contract, you put up payment or collateral — something of value to guarantee your side of the deal.

Then there are covenants. A covenant is similar to a contract, but more than a legal agreement. It's a "life agreement" in which two parties pledge themselves to each other. Marriages, at least Christian ones, are technically covenants between the bride, groom and God.

There are many covenants in the Bible, some of which have ended with the deaths of the humans involved. One of them was not just for individuals of the day it started. God has established an eternal covenant, one available to anyone willing to meet the terms of it. His Son, Jesus, has even covered the payment for it, sealing the covenant with his own life's blood. That was the price of entering a relationship with God. If you accept the terms

of this covenant, entrusting your life to Jesus, you receive the benefits of forgiveness and eternal life with him.

At the Last Supper, Christ showed his disciples the way to this covenant. He knew exactly what he was teaching his disciples with this new covenant. His body would be broken, and his blood spilled out for them and for us, yet he gave thanks for it, knowing this sacrifice would save the world from sin. We are to follow the example of Christ, giving thanks, even for the hard things.

READ: Luke 22:1-38. If you are short on time, focus on verses 17-19.

RESPOND:

- What's the significance and symbolism of "the cup" and "the bread" at Jesus' last supper (Luke 22:19-20)? (As we are reminded in every communion service, "the cup" represents Jesus' blood shed to atone for and cover our sins. "The bread" represents Jesus' body, which was broken because of our sin, a sacrifice he willingly accepted to save us from the wrath of our sins.)
- Why do we continue to observe this supper? (Luke 22:19 - Jesus told us to observe it to remember him.)
- In what ways is Jesus' model of leadership different from the world's ideals? (Luke 22:27)

You (Took - Application)

Testimony from Verna's daughter Lisa

When I was 11-12 years old, my church did a marvelous thing. We had a Ukrainian church come and use our building for their church as well. They stayed there for about four years. Because we lived in the parsonage next door, I got to join in many a service. I got to fellowship with Ukrainian youth who always tried to get me to say something in their language (sometimes things I wouldn't say in my language). I enjoyed many long church services and weddings (Oh, the food!). I got to be proposed to by the fathers for their sons because I looked like I had good childbearing hips, at 13.

I fell in love with a few of the families and continued to hang out with them for years later. I still remember the stories from the adults, many of them first-generation immigrants. One man still stands out in my memories. He was an older gentleman who played the piano amazingly. Since I, too, played, we had a sweet time sharing thoughts about music.

This man had very gnarly hands and large knuckles and fingers. It was amazing he could play. He saw me looking at his hands one time and told me that, while he was in a

concentration camp, he was beaten all over, and his fingers were broken at different times. I remember my tears as he shared this. Then he said, “Lisa, the Lord allows the pain in my hands to go away every time I sit at the piano and just worship him.”

Now, with tears in both our eyes, he sat down and played and worshiped in his language and mine. As I watched the sweet videos of my brothers and sisters in Christ worshiping amid certain calamities, I was taken back to those precious years of learning how to love Jesus from the depths of my being. No matter the circumstances, no matter the fear, no matter the consequences God is worthy to be worshiped. I am still praying for Ukraine and for many families who live here agonizing over their families far away.

ASK: How or when have you learned about the joys of ministry for our Lord and/or felt gratitude for others’ sacrifices that have benefited you or others you know? (Allow time for sharing.)

PRAY: Pray that you never become disillusioned or self-confident to the point of turning your back on Jesus. Pray instead to remain humble and willing to serve, following Jesus’ example and showing others what it means to know him.

ACT: Do something today to serve an individual or group over whom you might normally have status, position or leadership. For example, you might help a teammate who looks up to you with a particular skill. Perhaps you could assist a person who is new on the job with a difficult task. Or you could do something special for a youth ministry team in which you have a leadership role. You could even do a household chore for one of your siblings.

WRITTEN BY: Verna Qualls. Verna lives and works with her husband, Pastor Rick Qualls, in Bellingham, Washington. They have four children. Verna is a stay-at-home grandma and is available whenever needed by her 17 grandchildren.

Other's Gratitude

LaGrange WHFMS

SCRIPTURE: Ezra 3:10-11

PREPARATION: The purpose of this program is to focus our attention on the many blessings that the Lord has given us and how He is currently working in our lives. When we focus on all that the Lord has done and is doing, joy is a natural outcome. The book of Ezra recounts an interesting lesson in thanksgiving. As the Jewish people started rebuilding Jerusalem, they began with the temple, laying a physical foundation and a spiritual one with thanksgiving to God for the restoration. We have a similar thankfulness today when the foundations of faith are laid.

MUSIC SUGGESTION: If you have access to the music and lyrics of "Give Thanks" Hymns of Heritage and Hope #94, it would be appropriate.

Jesus (Hook-Introduction)

Let's build some joy by playing "The Hat Game." It was popularized as a "board game" which you can now buy in the shops, but the game has been played for generations with much enjoyment. You will need:

A hat or other container

A 1 minute timer or stopwatch

Lots of small pieces of paper

A pencil for each player

How to play:

Give all players a small notepad (or stack of 10-15 small pieces of paper) and a pencil.

Ask them to secretly write down on each piece the name of a famous person or character (biblical, alive or dead, fictional or non-fictional, real or cartoon). Fold each paper in half and throw them into the hat. When all the names are in the hat, give it a good mix.

Divide the players into teams. It is best to have at most 3 or 4 teams with at most 3 or 4 players on each team. Try to mix up ages and abilities, if you can.

One player is chosen from each team to start, and one team is chosen to start. At the signal, that player must pull a name from that hat and try to describe to the other players on his team who that character is, without using any of the names that are written down. For example, she could describe "Prince Charles" as "current British royalty, next in line

to the throne, Queen Elizabeth's first son" and so on, but not "a British prince." As soon as the character is guessed correctly, it is discarded and another is pulled from the hat. The other teams keep score and watch the time, shouting "Time's up!" after one minute. Carry on until each player has had a turn. Tally the correct answers for each team and declare a winning team.

Hints:

- If you write down the names yourself in preparation for the game, you can make sure that all players will reasonably know the characters. Otherwise, you should caution players to keep the characters they write down realistic, and remind them that they might end up describing a difficult character themselves, so writing them down might backfire on them!
- Include the names of some "real" people known to the players, such as the children's principal or a favorite aunt.

If you don't know a character, you can still often describe them to your team - if you don't panic. You might say, for example, "I don't know this character but his first name is the same as the British prince who is next in line for the throne, and his last name is a kind of coat that you put on when it is raining".

ASK: Now that we have played this game, think back to parts of the game that brought you joy. Why did these moments bring you joy? If you did not experience joy, why do you think that was? Share your reactions with the group.

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

The book of Ezra recounts an interesting lesson in thanksgiving. As the Jewish people started rebuilding Jerusalem, they began with the temple, laying a physical foundation and a spiritual one with thanksgiving to God for the restoration. We have a similar thankfulness today when the foundations of faith are laid.

READ Ezra 3: 10-11

"Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. They said, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His loving kindness is upon Israel forever" And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

ASK: In this passage how did the Israelites show their joy?

ASK: Think of a time when you were joyful for something that the Lord was doing in your life, how did you show your gratitude?

ASK: Are we as thankful as the Israelites were?

You (Took - Application)

Take a few moments to reflect on this devotional, thus far, what stands out most to you? Share your thoughts with the group.

The Israelites rejoiced as they laid the foundation of the temple. They wanted to share their joy. These stones symbolized the foundations of their faith and all the Lord had done for them.

ASK: What is the foundation of your faith? How was this foundation built?

ASK: How do we share our foundation of faith with your family and friends?

ASK: Can those around us see how grateful we are? How can we be more open in showing our joy?

ASK: How can we be more intentional in expressing our gratitude to the Lord? As we close today, let's be aware of how we show our gratitude and joy, not only to the Lord, but also to those with whom we come in contact.

PERSONAL CHALLENGE OPTION: Do something to celebrate a recent success, accomplishment, or milestone—for you personally, someone you know, your family, or a group you're part of. Go out for dinner or a special activity. This can inspire continued success. If you're not already part of a ministry, mission, or significant cause, then find a way to join with others who are doing something to honor God and help people.

PRAY: Give God thanks for the hope, healing, and restoration he provides through difficult and devastating times and for accomplishing His purposes regardless of circumstances. Pray for a unified purpose in your church or group.

WRITTEN BY: The LaGrange WHFMS located at Church of the Highlands in LaGrange Highlands, Illinois. Our group is composed of 14 active and dedicated members. We provide support to local, national, and international missions through various programs. It has been our honor to contribute one part of the 2025 WHFMS Program kit. We hope that this devotional has been a blessing to you.

Your Gratitude (Week of Prayer)

Pat Havener

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 103, Colossians 3:15-17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

PREPARATION: The purpose of this program is to explore the idea of feeling gratitude for the blessings we receive when we choose to live in Christ.

MUSIC SUGGESTION: Laura Story's "Blessings" either sheet music for someone to play or a recording to share. Copies of lyrics to print for each person present.

Jesus (Hook) *Introduce this lesson briefly by playing the following game.*

Count Your Blessings game

MATERIALS NEEDED: a blank sheet of paper and writing utensil for each person plus a timer

Activity:

1. On your signal to begin, everyone should write down everything they are thankful for that can be described in two words or fewer.
2. Set a timer for two minutes (or less) and tell them to begin.
3. When the timer goes off each person must count how many items she has.
4. The person with the most items should read her list. If anyone else has those items on their lists also, then everyone who has the items must cross them off the list. Only unique items should remain.
5. The next person continues similarly, calling out the items that remain on his/her list. If the item is unique it remains. If someone else has the same item, then all who have it cross the item off their lists.
6. Continue until everyone has gone, then each person must count up the unique items he or she has on the list.
7. Award a prize for the person with the highest number of unique answers.

Discussion:

1. What was the most surprising thing that someone was thankful for?
2. How did creating your list affect you?
3. Did you have more or fewer items than you thought you would have?

4. How did you feel when you discovered that others felt blessed for the same things as you?
5. Of all the things on your list, which is most significant for you?

David gives us a blessings list in Psalm 103. Paul admonishes that, in all we do, whether as individuals or the united body of Christ, we are to be thankful to God. If we are praying without ceasing, we will have cause to be thankful.

Blessings in Disguise

Begin this section with singing or listening to Laura Story's song "Blessings"

"Blessings" Lyrics by Laura Story

We pray for blessings
We pray for peace
Comfort for family, protection while we sleep
We pray for healing, for prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering
And all the while, You hear each spoken need
Yet love is way too much to give us lesser things
'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
What if Your healing comes through tears?
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?
And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?
We pray for wisdom
Your voice to hear
And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love
As if every promise from Your Word is not enough
And all the while, You hear each desperate plea
And long that we'd have faith to believe
'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
What if Your healing comes through tears?
And what if the thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?
And what if trials of this life are Your mercies in disguise?
When friends betray us
And when darkness seems to win

We know that pain reminds this heart
That this is not, this is not our home
It's not our home
'Cause what if your blessings come through raindrops?
What if Your healing comes through tears?
And what if the thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know You're near?
What if my greatest disappointments
Or the aching of this life
Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy
And what if trials of this life
The rain, the storms, the hardest nights
Are Your mercies in disguise?¹

Laura Story's "Blessings" was written as a reminder that God remains faithful even when things don't turn out the way we expect them to.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY: When Gary and I got the call to teach in Honduras, I went down early to go to "House Hunting International." We looked at several houses to rent in the small Honduran village of Sula. We saw one near the hospital, with no running water, but it did have occasional electricity. We saw one on the main highway, fenced, but in a seriously busy location. The next was a house across from the pool hall. Not a bad house, a fantastic location to walk to school, but somehow like the others, not quite right. We then looked at the old nurses' quarters at the old Sula Hospital. Bloodstained from a previous event, it was quite a mess. Promises of painting and cleaning made me know that this was the place where God was leading us to live. We would live in half of the building, with enough room for Jen, Gary and me. After a bit of cleanup, it was the perfect home for us. We walked to school and had a small pulperia (store) just outside the gate, drinkable water and electricity most of the time.

As time passed, I talked to the caretakers of the property and asked about opening the other half of the building for us. He asked why. I told him God was going to provide amazing things for us. He agreed, and after Christmas break, we had the entire building (kind of like "if you build it, they will come").

Well, they did. Almost immediately, Jen got a call from the doctor at the hospital. Could she take a nutritionally needy child to get him prepped for surgery? We ran over to the hospital after school. There, we were introduced to a very adorable 2-year-old. It was too

¹ Citation for Blessings by Laura Story: Story, Laura. "Blessings" Blessings, INO Records, 2011.

difficult for the family to care for him before surgery, so Jen willingly said yes! Meanwhile, the doctor turned to me and said, “I’ve got one for you, too.” She was 18 months old and had cancer. Unlike the 2-year-old, her mom was willing to stay with her. The doors swung wide open for the care of these children and more to follow. We had babysitters during the day so we could teach, and in the afternoons and evenings, we would work with the children (and moms) to make sure they were eating the most nutritional foods we could afford and find.

Surgery day was approaching for both children. We had been bringing the children back and forth to the hospital for regular checkups. Our little 2-year-old was thriving, but not our 18-month-old. She had become weaker and weaker. The doctor arrived from the States and came over to the house to see her. She was extremely weak, and doc told her mom that he would do the surgery in the coming days, but to prepare herself as the baby probably would not make it. She called her husband who was nine hours away on a bus. The next evening (the evening before surgery), he arrived, and the baby was active and playful. A true blessing for the parents!

The next day, I went to school as usual, but I got a phone call just after lunch from the hospital telling me the baby was dying. Having no car, I ran the mile to the hospital to find the mother outside sobbing. The hospital had told her she could not stay inside because she was crying too loudly! I scooped up the mom and informed the staff I was bringing her in to be with her baby. We arrived back inside in time for me to place the baby in her mom’s arms to take her last breath. She never made it to surgery. That night, the mom, dad and a little casket traveled the nine hours back home on the bus.

This is when I found this song. The many years of working in pediatrics had prepared me for this moment but did not change the sadness for all involved. A few days later, the mom contacted me. Through her sadness, she understood the victory over death and voiced the blessings that the baby had given to all of them in the words of Psalm 27:3. In Laura Story’s song it is explained this way, “There is a blessedness that comes through waiting on the Lord. There’s an intimacy that comes in our walk with the Lord through walking through that valley. There’s a reliance on His word that we only know when everything else fades away...”

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

The theme verse of this series is Psalm 16:11: “You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” (NIV) Psalm 27:3 says, “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.”

Psalm 27 invites people to believe that their faith in God will never desert them, no matter what happens. It can also give a feeling of comfort in difficult moments and to have faith that things will improve.

Story explained the inspiration behind writing the song. She shared that she went through a period of questioning God. She wanted to know why she spent years praying for her husband's healing, but it never came. She also felt stuck in a place where she needed to make a choice. She had to choose whether to judge God based on their circumstances or choose to judge their circumstances based on what they held to be true of God. She learned to wake up every morning and trust God with their lives. That's what 'Blessings' is about. It's considering the idea that maybe the blessing is found in the absence of what she's seeking in prayer.

The meaning behind this song is so precious and heartfelt. Sometimes life does not turn out the way we want it to, but we can't stop trusting God. He has something bigger and better in store for us. He is the only One who can see the big picture. Keep on trusting God especially when you go through trials because that is often when you experience God's greatest blessings.

You (Took - Application)

Are your mercies in disguise meaningful?

Trusting God for blessings means believing that everything – everything that enters our lives — has been filtered through the loving hand of an Almighty God. If we believe that we can accept those things even when we go through extremely hard things. We can look for blessings in them realizing that they are indeed mercies in disguise.

Blessings in Disguise

We don't often thank God for our trials, heartaches and difficulties. Although we are willing to praise him for his goodness, we sometimes do not realize that even adverse circumstances are blessings in disguise.

Scottish preacher George Matheson had a problem. He realized that he was not as ready to praise God when things went wrong as he was when they went right. However, after he began to lose his eyesight, he changed his thinking. He struggled for months with this weary burden until he reached the point when he could pray, "My God, I have never thanked you for my thorn. I have thanked you a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensated for my cross, but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory. Teach me the value of my thorn."

When we count our blessings, we need to include the weaknesses, the hardships, the burdens and the trials we face. If we do, we might find that God has used our difficulties more than the “good” things to help us grow spiritually. Why is that? Because it is in these difficult places that we turn to God. As we depend on him, we find that his strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Take a moment and think about the way God has led you. When you praise God for your blessings, do you remember to thank him for the thorns?

Blessings

The most basic definition of a blessing is “God’s favor and protection.” But what does that mean? Vaneetha Rendall Risner from “Desiring God” put it perfectly - “Scripture shows that blessing is anything God gives that makes us fully satisfied in him. Anything that draws us closer to Jesus. Anything that helps us relinquish the temporal and hold on more tightly to the eternal. And often it is the struggles and trials, the aching disappointments and the unfulfilled longings that best enable us to do that.”² Blessings go far beyond money or material things. It even goes beyond intelligent, obedient kids or the perfect husband. In those moments when we get what we have always dreamed of, there isn’t a need for God.

Suffering as a blessing

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul reminds the Roman church to rejoice in their sufferings! He says these sufferings are trials or tribulations that help us endure, which in turn shapes our character. Ultimately, this gives us hope that does not put us to shame, but instead makes us more like Christ. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the holy spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:3-5, ESV). These verses are a reminder of all the struggles we’ve experienced. It brings peace during a storm and highlights the truth that all the pain, tears and misery could be used for something far greater. To me, that is a blessing.

A biblical example of suffering

The Bible is filled with stories of real people going through trials. Let’s consider the apostle Paul. Paul gives us a short example in 2 Corinthians 11:22-27 of the suffering he endured during his time in ministry. He had been:

² Vaneetha Rendall Risner. “What Does It Really Mean to Be #Blessed?” *Desiring God*, 28 Apr. 2016, www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-it-really-mean-to-be-blessed.

- Imprisoned
- Flogged
- Exposed to death, again and again
- Lashed by the Jews five times
- Beaten with rods three times
- Pelted with stones
- Shipwrecked three times

He was always on the move, yet never safe from nature, bandits, Jews or Gentiles, the city or the country, and he knew what it was like to be hungry, thirsty, cold and naked. Even amid a storm (in prison), Paul wrote a letter to the Church of Philippi encouraging them in their faith. How many of us would ever have the strength to encourage anyone when we are in the middle of a storm? I barely have enough energy to encourage myself, let alone an entire church!

In Philippians 4:4, he encouraged them to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Paul understood what it meant to suffer, and yet he held on to his belief and realized that his suffering could be used as a testimony to God’s glory. Paul’s trials were blessings in disguise. Counting your blessings doesn’t mean you need to be happy for the pain and suffering you’re experiencing. Instead, it is about understanding how God is taking the opportunity to give you experience, mold you and use you to further his kingdom. Your pain is not in vain.

Paul was also the apostle who was given a thorn in the flesh to remind him of his dependency on the Lord. He begged God to remove the thorn and yet it remained (2 Corinthians 12:8). The Lord responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Took (Takeaway, Conclusion)

I used to believe that putting faith in God meant nothing wrong would ever happen to me. If I believed enough, then God would protect me from the pain and suffering of this world. But, when I learned what it meant to put true and complete faith in God, I discovered that pain and suffering were inevitable.

“God does not want our faith kept in mothballs, so He sometimes allows trials and testing to come into our lives; the unexpected hardships and heartbreaks that rock us in places we never thought we’d face as a child of God. And it’s in those defining moments that we

knock off the cobwebs of our everyday faith and face life with a new and improved one that's empowered by God himself.” — Ron Lambros

What does the Bible say?

It is easy for someone who may not read the Bible to believe that faith in God should end all suffering of any kind. Yet as you read the Bible, you learn that suffering is inevitable. Consider these few verses about trials.

- “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” - 2 Timothy 3:12, ESV
- When we choose to live godly lives, we will experience oppression, mistreatment, pain and suffering. In America, we may not feel persecuted, but Christians in the Middle East and Asia are persecuted regularly.
- “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” - James 1:2-4, ESV
- As followers of Christ, we will experience a variety of trials. For some of us, the trials come in the form of poverty, problematic relationships, abuse, addictions, etc.... For others, our trials look like sickness, disability or even the death of a loved one. One thing is certain - suffering will happen.
- “So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” - 1 Peter: 6-7, NLT

No matter what, we will endure suffering. Every single person on this earth will experience trials. Neither rich nor poor, black nor white, male nor female can escape the probability of being tested in their faith. Some will crumble under the suffering, giving up all hope, while others will find a way to thrive. Every circumstance is different, but we all have control of how we perceive and react to our situation.

We can either wallow in the despair of our suffering or we can look for the hope that exists, because even amid suffering, we can encounter blessings and experience joy.

Counting your blessings:

Be encouraged and allow God to use you during those seasons. Rejoice in knowing that although you may not understand why he will use it. There is a hidden blessing. Even if you don't see it or feel it; trust him.

When you look back, do you see how God was working through you? Did you find the hidden blessing in the thick of the mess?

How to count your blessings:

If you can't see the ways God has used your suffering, or you struggle to see the blessings in disguise, ask yourself these six questions.

1. What lesson(s) can I learn from this difficulty?
2. What can I be grateful for about this experience?
3. Instead of asking "Why me" ask "Why not me"?
4. How am I exacerbating or creating this challenge?
5. How can God use this opportunity?
6. How can I grow from this experience?

Close by reading the previously provided lyrics to "Blessings"

Portions adapted from "Blessings in the Midst of Trials" blog by Cynthia Cline on May 7, 2021.

WRITTEN BY: Pat Havener who lives in Seffner, Florida with her very patient husband of 50 years. Gary pastors the Seffner Community Advent Christian Church. Pat enjoys gardening, herbs and their cats Priscilla and Pete, especially Pete, who at 30 pounds needs a diet. She is a proud grandmother to seven grandchildren. Pat directs the church children's programs and serves as her local and national WHFMS Spiritual Life Chairman. Pat continues to volunteer for the Children's Heart Project of Samaritan's Purse and to train medical folks in women's and children's health in Honduras and other countries. She is a Certified RN Clinician, specializing in STDs, women's health and pediatrics.

Joy

Cheryl Harris

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 103, Colossians 3:15-17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

PREPARATION: This program is designed to help groups discuss and learn about the biblical concept of joy. Gather the following materials: 20 balloons, a timer, pencils and paper. Before others arrive, blow up about 20 balloons and use a marker to write letters on each balloon. Make sure you use both vowels and consonants. Include all five vowels at least twice.

MUSIC SUGGESTIONS: If you want music in your meeting, several ideas follow that could be used at different times in the meeting, if you have access to the music and lyrics to them: “All The Way My Savior Leads Me” (Hymns of Heritage & Hope #640), “As The Deer” (HoH&H 104), “He Touched Me” (HoH&H 680), “Down In My Heart” by George W. Cooke, “Amazing Love (You Are My King)” by Billy James Foote, “Give Them All To Jesus” by Bob Benson Sr. & Phil Johnson, “Holy Is The Lord” by Chris Tomlin and Louie Giglio, “If You Want Joy” by Joseph Carlson and “Be Ye Glad” by Michael Kelly Blanchard.

Jesus (Hook)

Open this lesson by playing the Hullabaloo Game, as follows:

Preparation: Divide the players into two teams. Explain that they must collect 10 balloons for their team when you say go. Then, they will work together with the balloons they’ve gathered to come up with as many words as they can.

Alternate Ideas: You can also adapt this game by adding more teams and/or more balloons with letters. You could also use the Scrabble scoring system so that certain letters are worth more points: 1 point - A, E, I, O, U, L, N, S, T, R. 2 points - D, G. 3 points - B, C, M, P. 4 points - F, H, V, W, Y. 5 points - K. 8 points - J, X. 10 points - Q, Z. You can use blends like bl, fr, gl, tr, ea, ee, th, ch, sh instead of single words on each balloon. If you use Scrabble scoring, these should be worth seven points.

Game Play: Shout GO! and set a timer of five minutes.

When the teams have ten balloons each, they need to work together to make as many words as possible from the letters. Ask one player in each team to scribe the words that

their team makes from the balloon letters. The winning team is the team with the most words at the end.

This is more difficult than you think because the team must work together as balloons habitually drift away.

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

Leader, more questions are provided than most groups will have time to discuss. Read through this discussion ahead of the meeting and choose the questions you have time to discuss.

ASK: Can you recall a time of deep distress and despair — when everything seemed to go wrong, and you felt helpless to change the situation? (This is an introductory question, but you can allow answers if you wish to allow discussion.)

SAY: Listen to the words of David.

READ Psalm 103.

ASK: What's David's main idea in Psalm 103? (God's blessings and benefits - 103:1-2)

ASK: What must we do to continuously enjoy the blessings and benefits God gives? (Remember to praise God for his blessings - Psalm 103:1)

ASK: How do you keep from forgetting all the benefits of serving God? (Seek personal answers.)

ASK: What's the most important gift one can receive from God? (Forgiveness, which only God can give, 103:3-16)

ASK: Why does God "not treat us as our sins deserve"? (God wants to forgive his creation and does so for those who seek him in repentance - 103:10)

ASK: What does it mean that God removes our sins? (God wipes out our sins through the blood of Jesus' sacrifice. -103:12)

ASK: What does it mean to fear the Lord? (Fearing God is respecting him, as children respect their earthly father, who is in charge of them and their safety. - 103:13)

ASK: What other benefits does God give us? (his love and righteousness, verse 17, and his kingdom, verse 19.)

You (Took - Application)

ASK: How has God blessed you as you have followed him? (Seek personal answers.)

As you've probably seen, several psalm writers expressed intense emotions and asked desperate questions, but never gave up. In their despair, they openly praised God for his love and faithfulness. Even when things remained difficult, they acknowledged the Lord as their only hope, sought him in prayer and trusted in him. Our ultimate hope and joy will be fulfilled when Jesus Christ keeps his promise to return for his faithful followers.

READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Paul commands the Thessalonian Christians to "be joyful always."

ASK: How have you found this works? How can you have joy when life is so often difficult? (Seek personal answers/testimonies.)

ASK: What does it mean to "pray continually"? (Answers should reflect the concept of living in communion with the Lord and seeking guidance in every situation.)

ASK: How does this constant prayer affect our joy? (Seek personal opinions, answers and/or testimonies.)

ASK: How does learning to "give thanks in all circumstances" increase our joy? (The action of seeking to give God thanks in all things involves seeing his hand at work in our lives which helps us to understand how he is working in and through us. This understanding increases our joy, as we see purpose in our struggle and pain.)

Leader, consider these two application ideas to close this devotion. If you have time for both, this is ideal. Another option is to let group members choose their applications.

- **Personal Application:** Remind yourself throughout each day to be looking for and giving thanks for every blessing.
- **Outreach to Others:** Encourage someone who is going through a difficult time. Do something practical to help or relieve them. If that person is open to your praying for him/her, do so, preferably in person.

WRITTEN BY: Cheryl Harris (whach@cheerful.com). Cheryl lives in a trailer in the woods of Ashland, Maine with her husband Bill, their dog Daisy and cats Doria and Ariel. Having retired from pastoring (Yes, God?), the couple work in local schools.

Jesus' Joy (Installation Service)

Karen Hall

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:2 and Philippians 2:1-18

PREPARATION: The purpose of this program is to install the officers for the 2025 year. On a board or poster print the theme verse found in Psalm 16:11 "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Purchase birthday candles with the numerals one, two, three, four and five. Wrap them in tissue paper in such a way that you cannot identify what the numeral is by touching it. Put all the candles in a gift bag.

MUSIC SUGGESTION: If you have access to the music and lyrics of "For the Joy Set Before Him" by Latifah Makuyi, it would be a wonderful closing song.

Jesus (Hook-Introduction)

SAY: "What is the joy that was set before Jesus that was so great he endured the cross? Our Salvation! Paul makes it clear in Philippians that Jesus humbled himself in obedience to God. Can we do any less?"

"Today we have the privilege of installing our officers for our WHFMS group. What a blessing it is to have loving Christian women who are willing to serve the Lord Jesus in this way. Our theme for 2025 is 'Count Your Blessings,' as we install these officers, we will do some counting of blessings for sure."

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

Ask the president to come forward. Say: "You have been elected as our president. As you begin this task, you may feel overwhelmed with all the responsibilities. It will be easy to begin listing all the things you need to do. Deciding there is more to do than you can get done will be natural. Your role in leading the group is vitally important without a doubt. As you focus on what needs to be done, be sure also to list what the Lord has allowed your group to accomplish. Remind yourself and the women how your group has been blessed and how God has used your circle to bless others."

Ask the vice president to come forward. Say: "You have been elected as our vice president. When we think of what the vice president does, we first think of supporting the president. That role is vital! Also, as the vice president, you are responsible for planning the programs. That task can be quite stressful. As you are completing your task, remind

yourself to be thankful for the women in your group who so beautifully present the programs. What a blessing to be able to work with such creative women.”

Ask the secretary to come forward. Say: “You have been elected as our secretary. Each time you have the privilege of taking the minutes of our meetings, remind yourself that you are actually recording blessings. You are recording the blessing of serving our Lord. Rarely does someone have that opportunity.”

Ask the treasurer to come forward. Say: “You have been elected as our treasurer. Every time you receive an offering and every time you send money out as directed by your group, you are receiving and sending out blessings. These finances truly represent the blessings of our Father who has allowed us to be a part of helping others.”

Ask the spiritual life chairman to come forward. Say: “You have been elected as our spiritual life chairman. This year as you encourage us in our spiritual walk you have the wonderful opportunity to remind us to count our blessings. Take this responsibility seriously, we are truly blessed.”

You (Took - Application)

Take the bag of birthday candles to the members and ask five individuals to reach in and take out a candle. Taking turns ask them to unwrap their candle and then share blessings equal to the numeral they have drawn. For example, if the woman has pulled out the “3” candle she should share three blessings with the group. After the five women have shared, put the candles on a table in the front of the room as a visual reminder of the many blessings we have received.

PRAY: “Father, we are so blessed. You have given us these officers to lead our group and for that we are grateful. We pray for a special blessing for them. Thank you for the members of our group. Thank you for the many talents they have and the love they have for You. Remind us to count our blessings. Thank you for your love. In Jesus name, Amen.”

WRITTEN BY: Karen Hall is the national WHFMS president. She and her husband David live at the Advent Christian Village. They have been truly blessed in so many ways. Karen says she counts each of you as a special God-given blessing in her life.

Other's Joy (Evangelism Emphasis, Women's Sunday)

Jan Hendrickson, Cheryl Harris

Groups are encouraged to use this devotional in a regular meeting, however, if planning a Women's Sunday, to use and expand upon these ideas.

Evangelism Emphasis:

PURPOSE: In this lesson, we will seek to learn about how God's power can lead to joy for other people. The book of Acts has many amazing stories, and one of the most inspiring ones was Paul and Silas' experiences in Philippi when they brought salvation to a jailer. The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God and shared the good news with his whole household. Does your joy overflow to those around you as the jailer's joy did? This program also has additional material at the end to adapt it into a Women's Sunday service focusing on having overflowing joy when we introduce someone to God's offer of salvation AND seeing that it is also our responsibility given by Christ to do so.

MUSIC: Hymns of Heritage & Hope #208 "How Deep the Father's Love," or "Alive, Alive Forevermore" from Integrity Music. If it is not possible to sing, read the words together.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:25-34 Have Bibles ready for use. Assign Scripture pieces at the start, to make reading through them smoother.

PREPARATION NEEDED: Look up the song "I Bless Your Name." The lyrics and/or the song will be shared at the end of the program. If you use YouTube, the group Selah does a great job.

Jesus (Hook) *Introduce this lesson briefly by playing the following game.*

This devotional will focus on Other's Joy. In the Acts Scripture, the Philippian jailer was struck by God's mercy and overcome by joy at not only keeping his physical life but also gaining a new spiritual life.

This Categories game can be played as a group activity or as a competition between individuals, pairs or small groups. Each individual or group should draw a 5x5 grid on a piece of paper. Then all should write agreed-upon categories (E.G.: plants, girls' names, cars, grocery items, colors, animals, jobs, Bible books, disciple names, song (or hymn titles) down the left side of the grid. Across the top, write alphabet letters. For our purposes, I recommend you use the letters S, A, V, E, D, to celebrate with the jailer his new life.

Each group's goal is the same: to think up a word for each letter and category. When all groups are done (or, if you need to be done for time, after a certain amount of time) compare lists. Any duplicate answers for each grid do not count. Answers must be unique to gain a point. The person or team with the most points wins.

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

READ: Acts 16:25-34

Ask questions about this scripture to explore Paul's understanding of salvation.

ASK: What was Paul's answer to the jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?"

ASK: What was the jailer's response?

ASK: What do we understand about love when we learn that Christ gave his life for us? (We must give our lives for other believers.)

LOOK (Look deeper into what might have happened as a result of this.)

ASK: What do you think was the final effect of this event on the town?

ASK: When have you seen this type of reaction to God's power?

You (Took - Application)

(Explore what lessons we should respond to after this study.)

ASK: How did you first respond to God's offer of salvation?

(Encourage each other as people share their answers. Leader, be prepared to start the sharing if no one volunteers quickly. You can also use the author's testimony below.)

PERSONAL TESTIMONY: I was raised in the Sparta Advent Christian Church in Ohio. Both of my grandfathers were pastors. I was involved in every aspect of the church from Sunday school to youth rallies and everything else the church offered. My family were all Christians and the faith of everyone was around me as a protection all of my life. I accepted Jesus at the age of 12, and was baptized. I remember being disappointed that I did not have a "mountain top experience." Because I had grown up in the church, I did not sense a big difference in my life. Looking back, I realize that my faith had not changed me so much. I was wearing it like a raincoat. It was only many years later that I realized what I was missing. I had married and had a son. However, my marriage was one of domestic

abuse for many years and my life was too hard for me to handle on my own. I was so thankful my childhood experiences had taught me about the love of God and I began to let the things I had learned change me. My faith became personal. No longer was it a cloak, it was a part of my very being. A song that has meant so much to me is “I Bless Your Name” by Carol Cymbala and James Hammerly. As I worked on this program the lyrics came to mind again. Please listen to the lyrics. (*If you want to play this song for the group it is available on YouTube.*)

Lyrics for “I Bless Your Name” by Carol Cymbala, James Hammerly

In prisoners’ chains, with bleeding stripes
Paul and Silas prayed that night
And in their pain, began to sing
Their chains were loosed And they were free
I bless your name, I bless your name
I give you honor, give you praise
You are the life, the truth, the way
I bless your name, I bless your name

Some midnight hour if you should find
You’re in a prison, in your mind
Sing out in praise, defy the chains
And they will fall in Jesus’ name

ASK: Who do you know who needs a helping hand or a loving prayer right now? (Allow answers and sharing.)

Encourage all present to pray for the people mentioned and for each other.

SHARED BY: Jan Hendrickson served as a missionary to the Philippines for three years. Even though she currently lives at the Advent Christian Village, in Dowling Park, Florida, in her heart she is still there. Jan is actively involved in the local WHFMS group at the Village.

Women's Sunday:

PURPOSE: To present a Women's Sunday service focusing on the joy of accepting God's offer of salvation and seeing our following responsibility given by Christ to share this with others.

PREPARATION NEEDED: Review the Order of Service and decide which parts will fit in your service and if you prefer a different order. The suggested plan included may be altered to fit your church's worship format. All hymn numbers are from Hymns of Heritage and Hope. If you are putting the lyrics to songs in print, make sure your church has a license to print them first.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF SERVICE:

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

Call to Worship - Hymns of Heritage & Hope #452 - A Communion Invitation

Opening Hymn # 1 – Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee

His Tithes & Our Offerings

Praise & Worship

He Touched Me (680)

Because He Lives (736)

As The Deer (104)

Share & Prayer

Scripture – Acts 16:25-34

Sermon – Other's Joy

Closing Hymn #403 - Heaven Came Down

Postlude

SUGGESTIONS FOR SPECIAL MUSIC:

Joy Unspeakable - Hymns of Heritage & Hope #626

Be Ye Glad © 1980 Michael Kelly Blanchard, Paragon Music

Bless the Name of Jesus © 1980 Carman

Create in Me a Clean Heart © 1984 Keith Green

Down in My Heart by George W. Cooke

I Could Sing of Your Love Forever ©1994 Martin Smith

Hymns of Heritage & Hope #452 - A Communion Invitation

LEADER: Come, children of God to a celebration of your restoration in Christ Jesus.

PEOPLE: We are sons and daughters of the new covenant — disciples of our sovereign King Jesus.

LEADER: In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are all children of the King.

PEOPLE: We have all been crippled by life's circumstances and scarred by sin. We hunger for the bread of life. We thirst for living water.

LEADER: You have been invited to the King's banquet table. Here your hunger will be satisfied, your thirst quenched, your life restored.

PEOPLE: We are one in Christ as we gather at his table. Here we taste afresh the joy of sins forgiven. We give thanks to our gracious Host and Savior Jesus.

Sermon – Other's Joy

God's power displayed in our lives can lead to joy for other people. The book of Acts has many amazing stories. One of the most inspiring ones was Paul and Silas' experiences in Philippi where they brought salvation to a jailer. The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God. He then shared the good news with his whole household. As you listen to this message, search your heart to see if your joy overflows people around you as the jailer's joy did. Is now the time for you to be refreshed and renewed in the joy of your faith? Or, are you ready to seek to give others joy by sharing the good news of the gospel with them?

What was Paul's answer to the jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved? (Wait for answers, or proceed to the answer.) In The Voice translation, Paul and Silas said, "Just believe — believe in the ultimate King, Jesus, and not only will you be rescued, but your whole household will as well."

And, what was the jailer's response? (Wait for answers.) Yes, he did. He called them gentlemen and asked what he could do to be liberated. Imagine this! He is the jailer to them, but he has realized what is holding him imprisoned

We need to understand what love truly is. We learn this when we see Christ sacrifice his life. The lesson from this for us? We must give our lives for others, so that they may become believers. We also need to support and encourage each other in Christ Jesus.

Just imagine the final effect of this event on the town. What happens when believers support each other and introduce others to Jesus' good news? Yes! Changed lives will change communities.

You (Took - Application)

(Explore what lessons we should respond to after this study.)

ASK: How did you first respond to God's offer of salvation? (Encourage people share their answers. Leader, be prepared to start the sharing if no one volunteers quickly. You can also use the author's testimony below.)

PERSONAL TESTIMONY: Jan Hendrickson, a retired Advent Christian missionary, was raised in the Sparta Advent Christian Church in Ohio. Both of her grandfathers were pastors. She was involved in every aspect of the church from Sunday school to youth rallies and everything else the church offered. Her family were all Christians, and the faith of everyone around her was a protection all of her life. She accepted Jesus at the age of 12 and was baptized. She remembers being disappointed that she did not have a "mountain top experience." Because she had grown up in the church, she sensed no big difference in her life. Looking back, she realized that her faith had not changed her so much. She was wearing it like a raincoat. Many years later, she realized what she was missing. She had married and had a son, but her marriage was one of domestic abuse for many years. Her life was too hard to handle on her own. She was thankful her childhood experiences had taught her about God's love, and she began to let the things she'd learned change her. Her faith became personal. No longer was it a cloak; it was a part of her very being. The song "I Bless Your Name" by Carol Cymbala and James Hammerly has meant much to her. As she worked on this program, the lyrics came to mind again. Please listen to the lyrics. (*If you want to play this song for the group it is available on YouTube.*)

Lyrics for "I Bless Your Name" by Carol Cymbala, James Hammerly

In prisoners' chains, with bleeding stripes,
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You are The Life, The Truth, The Way.
I bless your name, I bless your name.

Some midnight hour, if you should find,
You're in a prison, in your mind.
Sing out in praise, defy the chains,
And they will fall in Jesus' name.

Consider someone you know who needs a helping hand or a loving prayer right now.
(Allow answers and sharing.)

Allow those present time to pray for the people they thought of or mentioned and for each other. Close the service.

LESSON ADAPTED: By Cheryl Harris (whach@cheerful.com). Cheryl lives in a trailer in the woods of Ashland, Maine with her husband Bill, their dog Daisy, and cats Doria and Ariel. Having retired from pastoring (Yes, God?), the couple work in local schools.

Grace

Cheryl Harris

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:12-16

PREPARATION: This program is designed to help groups discuss and learn about the biblical concept of grace. Make sure you have enough Bibles for each person to have one.

MUSIC SUGGESTIONS: If you want music in your meeting, following are several ideas, if you have access to the music and lyrics of them: “Amazing Grace” (Hymns of Heritage and Hope #318), “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” (HoH&H #256), “All the Way My Savior Leads Me (HoH&H #640), “All I Want” by Brenton Brown, “Give of Your Best to the Master” by Howard B. Grose, and “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” by Chris Tomlin & Louie Giglio

Jesus (Hook)

Open this lesson by playing the What If You Were a Shoe? game, as follows:

Materials Needed: copies of questions, writing utensils and paper for all group members

Game Play: All players answer each question, and then share it with the others.

Example to Share: Question: If you were a shoe, what kind of shoe would you be and why? Possible Answers: (1) I would be flat-heeled thigh-high boots because they are comfortable, look awesome, sound bold, and protect from cold weather. (2) I’d be barefoot because I like to be free and unrestrained. (3) If I were a shoe, I think I’d be a multi-purpose hiking boot. Not only would I have the rugged durability to tackle tough outdoor terrain, but the flexible design would make it perfect for everyday wear. It would be waterproof and breathable, so I could keep my feet comfortable and dry no matter what the conditions. Plus, I’d customize it with lots of bright colors so I could truly express my style! (4) A pair of nicely broken-in cowboy boots, with just a little wear and tear for character. Black ones, not pink. Comfortable, but still pushy enough to make your hips sit right where they’re supposed to be. Maybe with steel tips.

Question Ideas:

- If you could have dinner with any person, alive or dead, who would it be and why?
- If you were to have lunch with a famous person, who would it be and why?
- If you could choose two people from history to have a conversation with one another, who would they be, and what would they talk about?

- If we lived in a perfect world, what would you go about doing and why?
- If you could meet anyone, living, dead or cartoon, who would you meet and why?
- How do you like to spend your time off from work or school? Why?
- What's your dream vacation? Why?

Others (Look & Book)

We often think that, if we could only have things our way, we could be happy. Yet, many of us have found in our experiences that what we thought we wanted was not as nice as we thought it would be. Fortunately, God Almighty knows better than we do.

Webster defines “grace” as, “unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification.” God’s Word teaches us clearly that our Lord has always been at work restoring us to fellowship with him. He understands just how much we need him and reaches out to us, giving us the mercy and grace we need.

READ Hebrews 4:12-16.

ASK: If Jesus never sinned, how can he truly understand the frustration and guilt of giving in to temptation as we often do? (Discuss opinions briefly.)

The author of this passage in Hebrews isn’t saying that Jesus experienced every exact temptation we have, but he does imply that Jesus endured every TYPE of human temptation. Therefore, he can personally empathize with all we go through. More importantly to us, Christ’s temptations were different from ours in his results. Some would argue that this means that Jesus can’t relate to our failures. However, think about this – he bore the punishment of ALL sin when he gave his life for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). He endured more than all of us put together. Since he never gave in to sin, he endured temptation more intensely than we ever will, pressing through to victory every time. Because of this, he knows exactly how to help us overcome, if only we will rely on him in all situations.

RESPOND

Leader, please review the questions here, as you may not have time in your meeting to discuss all of them.

ASK: Why and in what way is God’s Word “living and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword”? (4:12) Possible answer: God’s Word is living and active because

HE IS. Because he is life, when we apply his Word and live in him, we, too, are active and fully alive. “Sharper than any double-edged sword” means the Word does not stop at our shields and barriers. It cuts both ways, exposing what we hide from ourselves that God knows we need to deal with in surrender to his authority.

OPTIONAL ASK: What does it mean when it talks about the Word “dividing soul and spirit”? (4:12) Possible answer: Soul and spirit are so similar in English that most people think they are the same thing and use them interchangeably. The biblical definition in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 shows that people have a spirit, a soul, and a body. Understanding this truth is key to seeing the fullness of God and his love.

ASK: In light of verse 13, what must we keep in mind about our actions and accountability to God? (For further exploration: If none of us can hide our actions from God, why do we even try to disobey? What kind of arrogance (ignorance?) does this imply?)

ASK: How should this affect our daily lives? (Have group members share ideas.)

ASK: What does it mean that Jesus is our high priest, and how should that inspire us to “hold firmly to the faith we profess”? (4:14, also Hebrews 8:1. Answers should include the understanding that Jesus has lived a sinless life on this earth, died for our sins - better than any animal sacrifice - and is interceding on our behalf at the right hand of God. This should give us hope and courage to keep firm in our faith.)

ASK: Why and in what way is Jesus able “to sympathize with our weaknesses”? (Hebrews 8:15 - He has lived life as a human and understands our weaknesses.)

ASK: What’s significant about Jesus’ having “been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet ... without sin”? (4:15). Answers should reflect the understanding that it is possible to choose not to sin, but it requires connection to and dependence on God.

ASK: In what way can this provide comfort and help? Why can you approach God with confidence? (4:16). Answers might include that it is comforting to know we are not alone, and that Jesus can help us as he understands our struggles, and that he is at God’s right hand interceding for us.

ASK: What were two qualifications for a godly high priest, and how does Christ fulfill both of these? (5:1)

ASK: What does it mean that Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered”? (5:8) How is this an example to us? (Seek answers from group members.)

You (Took)

PRAY: Thank Jesus for making the way for you to have a relationship with God. Thank him for understanding your struggles and weaknesses, and for helping you to overcome them. Give God thanks that you can approach him with confidence whenever you need help. Pray that you’ll endure suffering if that’s what it takes to fulfill God’s plans for you.

ACT: Wisely avoid situations that could unnecessarily expose you to temptation. But when you do encounter trouble or temptation, rely on Jesus for help and strength to overcome and to do what honors God.

WRITTEN BY: Cheryl Harris (whach@cheerful.com). Cheryl lives in a trailer in the woods of Ashland, Maine with her husband Bill, their dog Daisy and cats Doria and Ariel. Having retired from pastoring (Yes, God?), the couple work in local schools.

Other's Grace (Mission Emphasis)

Karen Hall

SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:1-18 and 2 Corinthians 9:13

PREPARATION: Review the Scripture lessons enough that you can share them naturally. The Scripture in Acts is a long story, but one with which most are familiar.

MUSIC SUGGESTION: If you have access to the music and lyrics of "Nobody" by Casting Crowns and Matthew West, share it after the Hook.

Jesus (Hook-Introduction)

"Hot Seat"

Preparation: Create two teams. Have one person from each team sit in a "hot seat" - a chair in front of the group with a word written on a board (whiteboard, chalkboard, or posterboard on easel) behind them. The two in the seats should not be able to see the word behind them.

Directions: Choose a team to start (however you want). That team's members take turns trying to describe, define, provide an example, or explain what the word is so that the person in the hot seat can guess the word. If their person guesses wrong or does not guess it, the word goes to the other team. If the person gets it right, the team gets a point. Next, new team members take their spots. The team with the most points wins.

Suggested Words to Use: God, Word, apostles, believers, Gentiles, Judea, Peter, Jerusalem, vision, heaven, animals, reptiles, birds, eat, impure, mouth, three, house, Holy Spirit, six, brothers, angel, message, household, saved, beginning, baptized, gift, way, objections, praised, repentance, life, service, prove, praise, obedience, confession, gospel, Christ, generosity, sharing, everyone

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

God's grace to us should lead to our sharing it with others. The early church learned this lesson as God called them to share the gospel, even with Gentiles (Acts). Some of those Gentiles were later commended by Paul (2 Corinthians) for their generosity which caused even more people to praise God.

SAY: "The Scripture today is one that we have heard, but it is not often used as a sermon topic. Instead of reading the Scripture, I am going to tell you about it as if it were a short

story. It is taken from Acts 11: 1-18.” (Look out at the group and share as if you were reading a story to them.)

SAY: “Now we all know Peter, he was often in the middle of some type of controversy, or he acted impulsively. One time he was criticized by the Jews for eating with Gentiles. No good Jew would do that and Peter had prided himself on being a good Jew. So, he shared with them about the experience he had in Joppa.

“I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. Then I heard a voice telling me, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’” “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

Surprisingly, when the Jews heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

SAY: “We know that devout Jews did not eat the foods that Peter saw in his vision. It would be as if we were told to eat or drink something that was dirty. We would never pick up something that had been on the road and eat it. We would find that disgusting! For Peter to believe he could eat these foods required a major change in his life.”

ASK: Why do you think Peter was shown the vision three times?

If Peter had not seen the vision what would most likely have been his response to the three men who asked him to go with them?

Peter was not the only one who had a vision in this story. The man from Caesarea had been told by an angel to send for Peter. What does this show about God's preparations? What does it show about God's love?

Since we know that God truly loves others and that we are called to share the news of Jesus' love to everyone why is it sometimes so difficult to do?

SAY: The fact that the Jews praised God that the Gentiles could be granted repentance that leads to eternal life was a miracle. The Holy Spirit worked with them as well as Peter and the man from Caesarea. The working of the Holy Spirit is something we often either ignore or take for granted. Let's take a moment now to thank God for the working of the Holy Spirit.

PRAY: Father, thank you for the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Help us to recognize the work and to never take it for granted.

SAY: Paul in his letter to the people of Corinth said that God will be praised by others for our obedience. Read this verse now.

2 Corinthians 9:13 (New International Version):

“Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.”

ASK: What have we done as a WHFMS that will cause others to praise God?

ASK: What have others done that has led us to praise him?

You (Took - Application)

Telling others about Jesus is a privilege that we may fail to recognize or even avoid for various reasons. Hudson Taylor said, “The great commission is not an option to be considered but a commandment to be obeyed.” We know that the joy of seeing others come to know Christ Jesus as their Savior is unmatched by any other. As we consider this devotional today let us thank God for two things. First, thank him that someone or many someones cared enough to teach you about him. Then, thank him for the blessing of being able to tell others. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you both the opportunity and the courage to share his love.

WRITTEN BY: Karen Hall is the national WHFMS president and loves sharing with other women about God's blessings. She and her husband, David, live at the Advent Christian Village and have so much for which to be thankful. God is so good.

Your Grace – With a New Master!

Sue Oberdier

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:14 and Romans 12 (prepared with New International Version)

PREPARATION: Gather paper and writing utensils enough for each person for the opening activity. Optionally, a chalkboard or white board could be useful.

MUSIC: If using music, have hymnals, sheet music or lyrics available. Suggested songs include -“Wonderful Grace of Jesus” (Hymns of Heritage and Hope #321), “Purify My Heart,” Hymns of Heritage and Hope #118)

PURPOSE: In this lesson we will learn that, because of grace, we can claim a new master and be set free from the dominion of sin. Through Jesus, we have the freedom to worship God, serve others and overcome evil.

Jesus (Hook-Introduction)

Game: “I Have Never...” (or “Never have I Ever...”) game

Materials Needed: Enough chairs for all members and a space big enough for them.

Preparation: Make sure there are enough chairs for each person and place them in a circle with one chair in the center.

Directions for Game Play: Every person takes a chair, with one being in the center chair, or the “mush pot.” The person in the mush pot begins by completing the sentence, “I have never ...” with something he or she has never done, but something that someone else in the circle might have done. For example, the person in the mush pot might say, “I have never been to New Zealand.”

As soon as the first person makes his or her statement, everyone in the circle who has had that experience must get up and find a new chair as quickly as possible. The last person standing has to take the chair in the mush pot.

The object of the game is to get to know interesting things about each other and have a lot of fun doing it.

HOOK: Sing together “Wonderful Grace of Jesus” (Hymns of Heritage and Hope #321) in your hymnals.

Others (Look & Book - Bible lesson)

Give each person paper and a pen. You may want a dry-erase board on which to write a “master list” as the lesson progresses.

SAY: Do you remember a time when someone gave you a special gift that was not something that could be gift-wrapped? (such as a gift of service or a gift of prayer for you)

BOOK: (Scripture)

SAY: Let’s look at an amazing gift from God. As believers, we no longer are ruled by sin. That was our old master. Because of grace, we have a NEW master!

Have someone read Romans 6:14 (NIV).

ASK: What is “the law” in this verse? (God’s commands spoken to Moses in Exodus & Deuteronomy)

ASK: Does freedom from the law mean we are free to sin? (No!)

ASK: What should our reaction be when we are given grace instead of what we deserve? (gratitude, stronger faith, joy, more acts of service)

SAY: Let’s dig deeper now in Romans chapter 12, verses 1-13 (NIV).
Have someone read verses 1-2.

ASK: What is the Lord asking us to do? (present our bodies as a living sacrifice, be holy, do not be conformed to this world, be transformed)
Encourage group members to write these precepts on their paper as you write them on your board.

ASK: What are the positive outcomes of obeying these precepts? (pleasing God, acts of worship, renewing of your mind, knowing God’s will)

SAY: Reading on in Romans 12, God gives us some practical actions for Christian living.

Have someone read Romans 3-8 (NIV).

ASK: What was Paul given that qualified him to give us these guidelines? (grace)

ASK: What gifts were given, and how should we be using them? (prophecy - use it in proportion to faith, serving - serve well, teaching - teach well, encouraging - encourage often, contributing to the needs of others - give generously, leadership - govern diligently, mercy - show it cheerfully)

LOOK: Ask someone to read Romans 12:9-13 (NIV).

These verses are a concise checklist of how to apply grace practically. (Encourage everyone to write the answers to this next question on their papers, while you write them on the dry-erase board.)

ASK: Given God's grace, what marks of a Christian are in this passage? (love what is good, hate what is evil, cling to what is good, be devoted to one another, honor one another above yourselves, never be lacking in zeal, keep your spiritual fervor, serve the Lord, joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, share with God's people in need, practice hospitality)

ASK: Share a time when you were able to use these attributes to show grace to someone else. (You may need to share your example first.)

You (Took - Application)

Grace has given us a new master. No longer do sin and law rule those who have accepted Christ's calling. Paul teaches this clearly in Romans, applying the principles to teach us that we are to think by faith instead of law about how we can worship God, serve others, and overcome evil.

God gives us many opportunities to show grace to others. As you begin each day with prayer, ask the Lord to guide you toward being gracious to others, using your list as a reminder of specific areas of service. Find ways to use these gifts individually and in the church. Let's work together to glorify Jesus!

OPTIONAL: Close with the chorus "Purify My Heart," page 118 in the hymnal.

SHARED BY: Sue Oberdier lives near Richwood, Ohio, and worships in the Claibourne Advent Christian Church with her sweetheart of 55 years. She thanks the Lord for her three children and seven grandchildren. She loves country life and puttering in the yard.