



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 1: What Makes Up a Human Soul?

Objective

Students will identify what Jesus means by “soul,” and express how the soul is who you really are—the deep, integrating center of a person that connects us to God and also to others. (You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)

Featured Scripture

Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your **heart**, all your **soul**, and all your **mind**.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Matthew 22:37-39 NLT

Lesson

For thousands of years, the “Shema,” which Jesus is quoting in the featured scripture from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, has been an important daily prayer in Judaism. The word “Shema” is a Hebrew word that means “HEAR,” or listening that leads to action. The Shema foundationally defines how the soul is not a hidden or separate part of a person, but it *is* the living SELF—the whole person in motion, breath, desire and DEVOTION. Essentially, in our Creator’s view, the soul ANIMATES who we *really* are before Him and others, and even ourselves.



“Who am I?” is one of the most important questions we ever ask about ourselves as humans. If we understand that we are made in the image and imagination of God, we are SOMEONE before we can ever DO anything.

According to the Bible, the SOUL, called the “nefesh” in Hebrew, is really the core of our being. It’s the part that feels, craves, EXPERIENCES, creates our intentions, and makes life meaningful. It is where we get our capacity to not only feel LOVE, but to put it into action!

In God’s view, the soul is what makes us a person—not the body. Bodies may age, weaken, become ill, or even be disabled in some way, yet these changes never alter a person’s WORTH or identity. Personhood is defined by love capacity, not physical capability.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What does the Hebrew word “Shema” mean? **Answer:** Hear
2. . Name two ways the soul is described in this passage. **Answer:** In motion, breath, desire, devotion, living self, personhood (any two)
3. Why is the soul more important than the body according to this passage?
Answer: The soul defines personhood and identity, not the body.
4. How might knowing you are made in God’s image affect how you treat other people?
Answer: (Student reflection; e.g., “It helps me value others for who they are, not just what they can do.”)
5. Why do you think the question “Who am I?” is important for humans to ask? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g., “It helps us understand our identity and purpose.”)

Have you heard the phrase that “Jesus came to SAVE our souls?” What does that mean, and why do our souls need “saving” anyway?

Our souls need saving because, according to the Bible, something has gone wrong at the deepest level of who we are. The soul—the living self made to love God and others—has become disoriented, wounded, and SEPARATED from its true source of life. The capacity to love is God’s gift to the soul, but sin weakens it. Sin fragments the person, and taints love’s desires toward self-protection, CONTROL, fear, or pride. Relationship breaks down. Our souls are no longer in harmony with our Creator or others. Our souls start to wander.

Isaiah 53:6 says it this way: “All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.” This verse was talking about how Jesus would be the One to save our souls from sin, but it was written 700 years before Jesus ever came!

SHEEP are a great metaphor for the human soul, believe it or not! Now, sheep aren’t unintelligent—but they are dependent! They don’t naturally find good PASTURE or safe paths on their own. They need a shepherd because they tend to wander—they can graze a little too far, then a little more, and they can become “lost,” often because they have become disconnected little by little from the voice and protection of their shepherd. They also have strong herd instincts which can cause them to follow one another, even into danger, like off a cliff! Like sheep, our souls need protection, and Jesus calls Himself “the Good Shepherd.”

The soul is the place in us that is responsive to truth and love. John 10:27 says, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” The soul is the part of who we are that seeks to KNOW and be known. St. Augustine of Hippo, an early Christian thinker who lived from 354-430 AD, said it this way: “Our heart is restless until it rests in You.”

Jesus said that part of “salvation” is this “rest” in one’s soul. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavily burdened [by religious rituals that provide no peace], and I will give you rest [refreshing your souls with salvation]. (Matthew 11:28 Amplified).

We humans were made with the ability to make our own decisions, though. It's called "free will." So we have to decide for ourselves if we will listen, if we will love the LORD with our entire person, if we will come to Him. Making that DECISION to follow Jesus and to be led by Him is not always so easy, and we will continue to explore the human condition of the soul in the rest of this series.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. **Spell the word for someone who tends to sheep.** **Answer:** Shepherd
2. **What has gone wrong with our souls?** **Answer:** Disoriented and wounded / Separated from God / Fragmented (any valid phrase)
3. **How is our soul like a sheep?** **Answer:** The soul can wander and needs a shepherd to guide and protect it.
4. **What is "free will"?** **Answer:** The ability to make our own decisions.
5. **Describe what it means to have rest in one's soul.** **Answer:** (Student reflection, e.g. "Rest in the soul means peace, relief from burden, and being aligned with God's love and guidance.")

Context Clues

In Jesus' time, people had different ideas about the soul. Many Romans followed philosophers like Plato and the Stoics, who believed the soul was the thinking, rational part of a person and that the body was temporary or even a problem. They thought the best life was one where the soul rose above physical desires and emotions.

In Jewish life, the soul meant the whole living person – body, breath, feelings, choices, and relationships – all connected to God. Jesus brought a new way of thinking by keeping the Jewish idea of the whole person but adding something radical: He taught that the soul is found not by escaping the body or being self-focused, but by trusting God and loving others. Jesus said that when we are

willing to give our lives away, we actually save our souls, showing that the soul is our whole life being shaped by love and relationship with God.

Then & Now

Then – Jesus’ View of the Soul:

Jesus taught the soul as the whole person—heart, mind, body, and will—made to be fully known by God. Life is found in love, trust, and self-giving, and death opens the door to eternal life and restoration with God through Him.

Now – Modern Science:

Materialism long saw the soul as just brain activity (this idea resurfaced through “science” in the 17th century), ending at death. But today neuroscience and neurosurgery reveal consciousness may go beyond the brain, challenging purely material explanations even in scientific communities. They are grappling with what is called “the hard problem of consciousness.”

Contrast:

Jesus saw the soul as **relational, eternal, and purposeful**; modern science is beginning to recognize that the self may be **more than matter**, hinting at the depth Jesus described.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

Jesus replied, “You must love the LORD your God with all your **heart**, all your **soul**, and all your **mind**.” Matthew 22:37

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project’s Video: “What It Means to Love God with All Your Soul” (4:23) https://youtu.be/g_igCcWAMAM?si=yUreICf5EnKSTcVI
- Listen to the hymn, “Come Thou Fount” by Robert Robinson and reflect on the sheep imagery. <https://youtu.be/eQDOwb3yURk?si=c7NdsAFqNRkei56W>

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- Read the story behind the song “Come Thou Fount” and the song’s author:
<https://blogs.crossmap.com/stories/hymn-history-come-thou-fount-enjoying-the-journey-Q0eXMvfbGealbjW-QNKBT>
 - Watch “Neurosurgeon Shares the Experience That Made Him Believe in God–Dr. Egnor” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoX7XQhJMuA> (10:34)

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of the soul:

1. Report / Short Essay

- Write what your thoughts are about this idea: “In God’s view, the soul is what makes us a person—not the body.” How do you consider your “personhood” and why would you want to put it in Jesus’ care?

2. Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics

- Write a poem or song about the soul.
- You could use imagery from the lesson, like sheep, shepherds, wandering, and rest.

3. Find a Scripture passage about the soul and comment on it OR comment on the Song “Come Thou Fount”

- You can use a Bible, an online Bible, or a Bible app for verses about the soul, heart or mind
- Listen to a new or old version of the hymn “Come Thou Fount.”

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

Core Lesson Words (Capitalized for emphasis)

1. SOUL
2. LOVE
3. WORTH
4. SHEPHERD
5. REST
6. DECISION
7. SOMEONE
8. DEVOTION
9. ANIMATES
10. SAVE

Supporting Vocabulary

11. HEART
12. MIND

13. LIFE

14. GOD

15. NEFESH (Hebrew word for soul)

16. HEAR (Shema)

17. GUIDANCE

18. TRUST

19. FOLLOW

20. PEACE

Optional Challenge Words

21. SEPARATED

22. FRAGMENTED

23. DISORIENTED

24. RESPONSIVE

25. CONSCIOUSNESS



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 2: What is the Power of Love?

Objective

Students will explore the biblical meaning of love by learning that God is love and that love is the greatest commandment. Through Jesus' example, they will consider how receiving God's love empowers them to love God, others, and themselves in healthy, shame-free ways. (You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)

Featured Scripture

Beloved, let us love one another, for **love is from God**, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:8 ESV

Lesson

Jesus carried a calm confidence, and taught and acted with a spiritual authority that flowed from a deep love BOND with the Father. This deeply unsettled the religious leaders (rabbis) of His time, 2,000 years ago. Because of this, leaders mumbled, "Who does He think He is?" and often tried to CHALLENGE or trap Him with questions. One asked Him, "*What is the greatest commandment?*"

This wasn't a simple question. By then, God's original Ten Commandments (see Exodus 19) had grown into **613 laws**, along with many human-made interpretations. Instead of

drawing people closer to God, many of these RULES had pulled them away from His heart.

Jesus responded by cutting through the complexity. He quoted the **Shema**, a daily Jewish prayer:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, (strength), and mind... and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–38).

In simple terms:

LOVE God. Love others. Love yourself. And love with all that you are.

This becomes a basic—but not easy—guide for how to live and love well. In the last lesson, we talked about the soul as the place where we feel, choose, and act—it’s our essence and personhood. It’s where love emanates from. But that raises an important question: *what does “love” really mean* as far as God had in mind?

In English, we use the word *love* for many things—from our favorite music to romantic relationships. We often picture love symbolically with a red heart or an emoji 🍷. But the Bible goes deeper. Scripture tells us that God doesn’t just *have* love—**God is love** (1 John 4:16). Love is CENTRAL to who He is.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is another word for commandments? **Answer:** Laws

2. What is the universal symbol for love? **Answer:** Red heart

3. . Name one (or all) of the three places where our love is supposed to land. **Answer:** God, Others, Ourselves

4. What is meant by “God IS love?”

Answer: (Student reflection; e.g. God embodies all that love is; Love is defined by God.)

5. Why do you think rules multiply when love-centered relationships seem to break down? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “When relationships break down, more rules

take their place because love and trust are no longer guiding people and power tries to force compliance.”)

To understand God’s love more fully, we need to “get to the heart of the matter” by looking at two key biblical words—one from Hebrew in the Old Testament, and one from Greek in the New Testament:

HESED (Hebrew): faithful, steadfast, merciful love. Hesed is not about feelings—it’s about promises kept within a commitment or COVENANT. It’s love that refuses to let go.

AGAPE (Greek): self-giving love expressed through action. Agape seeks the good of others, even at great personal COST.

Psalm 85:10 brings these ideas together beautifully:

“Unfailing love (hesed) and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.”

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the word *testament* literally means *covenant*. A covenant is like saying, “I belong to you, and you belong to me”—similar to the commitment in marriage, but God’s side comes loaded with so many potential benefits if we believe and obey Him.

God made a covenant of love with Israel. He remained FAITHFUL, but His people often broke the covenant by turning away to their own selfish desires. That is why God sent Jesus—to establish a new covenant for ALL people. His story is a desire to create His family, and to claim us as His own daughters and sons. Romans 8:15 (NLT) says it this way: “So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.”

So remember that picture of FAMILY. Through Jesus, God showed us humans how to be restored to Him. This new covenant is built on **sacrificial** love (agape) from a relational Father and an obedient Son with a mission of family love to fulfill. John 3:16 says:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...”

Notice the word “so.” It points to the depth and magnitude of God’s love—a love given abundantly, without holding back. The new covenant, sealed by Jesus’ sacrificial love, gives humanity the opportunity to reconnect with God forever:

“...that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This is God’s heart for everyone—everyone who will AGREE to this relationship.

The power we have to love at all comes from God because He loved us first (1 John 4:19). Jesus lived a life that showed us how to love and gave us the grace and ABILITY to learn how to do it. He said:

“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:12–14).

None of us can love perfectly like Jesus. We make mistakes and poor choices all the time, and we hurt people. That’s why a big part of love is learning to FORGIVE and asking God to help us be less self-centered and more others-focused. We show we love Jesus by OBEYING His command to love.

Modern theologian Dallas Willard said, **“Love is not something that comes naturally; it must be learned.”** How do you learn what love is? You look at Jesus. He assured, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Jesus reveals the Father not just in word, but in presence, POSTURE, and love.

Read 1 John 4:16–19 for a powerful picture of the **cycle of love**—how receiving God’s love



enables us to love Him back, love others, and love ourselves in healthy, shame-free ways.

The love Jesus taught elevated the status of those considered property or inferior in Roman society—women, children, slaves, the disabled, and the poor. He showed that **every human being has inherent worth and is worthy of love**—a revolutionary idea at the time. He showed that love is a GIFT, not something that is earned but is received.

Jesus' demonstration of the Father's heartbeat of love liberated humanity from shame, fear, and social rejection. It invited people to love God first, and then to serve others by giving that love away. If you want to have a heart that is COHERENT (working together in harmony and alignment with God's order of things), learn how to receive and give love!

Do you want to join this love revolution?

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is the name of the structure that God is trying to create by offering His love.

Answer: Family

2. . What are the two Biblical words used to describe love-types in this lesson. **Answer:** Hesed and agape)

3. Why do you think God refers to people who love Him as children? **Answer:** (Student reflection, e.g. "Children are allowed access and are loved within family.")

4. What does it feel like to you when you are feeling secure in love? **Answer:** (Student reflection, e.g. "I feel calmer. I feel like I can be myself and not be judged.")

5. How does everyone taking on the personal responsibility of loving as Jesus instructs create stronger relationships among real families and friendships? **Answer:** (Student reflection, e.g. "Governing your own heart and motives would bring mutual respect and trust that creates strong bonds.")

Context Clues

Jesus looks at our hearts. John 2:25 says, “No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart.” Neuroscientist Caroline Leaf has done extensive study on the power of renewing and training our thoughts and intentions, and she has concluded that we are physically and spiritually “wired for love.”

She points out that **our brains grow, heal, and function optimally when we experience love**—things like kindness, empathy, forgiveness, and meaningful connection actually strengthen neural pathways and promote mental and physical health. In contrast, chronic fear, rejection, shame, and isolation activate stress responses in the brain and body that can damage both emotional regulation and physical well-being. In other words, the brain literally breaks down under unloving conditions and builds up under loving ones.

Leaf often connects this to Genesis and the character of God, explaining that because humans are made in the image of a relational, loving God, **our nervous systems are designed for relationship**. Love creates coherence—alignment between the mind, brain, and body—while fear and toxicity create chaos. She emphasizes that renewing the mind through truth, love, and intentional thought patterns can physically rewire the brain, reinforcing the idea that love restores what stress and trauma disrupt.

Then & Now

Then — Psalm 136 was a popular hymn

[Psalm 136](#) is a great passage to read (especially in The Message translation) in order to picture God’s HESED-type of love that is unending. Tradition has it that this Psalm was sung in Solomon’s temple and was a popular ancient hymn—kind of like how you might sing familiar worship songs in church. After each line, almost like a pulse, or a heartbeat, the words are “His love never quits.” That line is repeated 26 times! Now, numbers really matter symbolically to the Hebrew mind and in the study of the rabbis. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet also has a

number attached to it that means something deeper. You add up the numbers attributed to the letters in a word, and it reveals hidden connections (called “gematria”). It is no accident that this line was repeated 26 times. 26 is the sum of the numerical value of the Hebrew name for God, spelled YHWH (Yahweh). Yod (10)+Hey (5)+Vav (6)+Hey (5)=26. He is a faithful, loving God at his very core.

Now – Modern Science:

This will blow your mind! The magazine *Popular Mechanics* came out with an article in 2025 with this title: “Earth Pulsates Every 26 Seconds. No One Knows Why.” Did you catch that? The Earth has a mysterious, rhythmic seismic pulse, often called its “heartbeat,” that repeats every 26 seconds, detected by seismometers worldwide since the 1960s, originating from the Gulf of Guinea and linked to ocean waves or volcanic activity, though its exact cause remains an unsolved geological puzzle. Could this be a way of God showing his loving “heartbeat” for human kind? Romans 1:20 does say, “For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” I’ll let you ponder that!

Memorize: Write this on your heart

We love each other because he loved us first. 1 John 4:19

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project’s “God Loves You, But What Does that Mean?” (5:11)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfbyFLgs_NM
- Watch “The Earth’s Mysterious Heartbeat” (3:27)
<https://youtu.be/dVvZwSSpsz0?si=orOip036-SUBFyIZ>
- Watch “When NASA saw Pluto’s Heart”
<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/YST6GZyA3cg> (00:56)
- Watch Dr. Caroline Leaf’s video “We are Wired for Love.” (2:37)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds-S3fzJba4>

- Watch Heartmath's "Science of the Heart" (1:36)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pp-r_f8-qz8
- Listen to the hymn, "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" by Anna Warner. (2:12)
<https://youtu.be/LONkzLLNPmA>
- [ps://youtu.be/48fzSjZ9VYw?si=HJmaEaLJsGHkl4Xk](https://youtu.be/48fzSjZ9VYw?si=HJmaEaLJsGHkl4Xk) Read the story behind the song "Jesus Loves Me" and the song's author:
<https://iblp.org/hymn-history-jesus-loves-me-this-i-know/>

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of the love of God:

1. **Write a letter to God/Jesus or to a family member, friend, or someone who works with you. In the letter, specifically point out the ways that they love you well, and why you are thankful for that love.**
 - Think about the qualities of God's kind of love, and how these are embodied and given by others to you, and how that makes you feel.
 - Put your letter in a card and send it in the mail or hand deliver it to a person.
2. **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about God's vision for love.
3. **Listen to the song "Jesus Loves Me" while beating a drum to the rhythm. Read about the story behind this well-loved hymn and write about why you think it has become one of the most well-known songs of our time all around the world.**
 - Listen to your favorite rendition of this hymn several times this week, and move your body to it.
 - Listen to it in a different language too.
 - Think critically as to why it has endured.

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

1. LOVE
2. GOD
3. HEART
4. FAMILY
5. BOND
6. RULES
7. COVENANT
8. FAITHFUL
9. COMMANDMENT
10. HESED
11. AGAPE
12. SACRIFICE
13. OBEY
14. FORGIVE
15. GRACE
16. TRUST
17. RELATIONSHIP
18. PRESENCE
19. CONNECTION
20. ABILITY

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WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 3: Why Are We Worth It?

Objective

Students will understand that humans are valued because we are made in God's image. They will see how God forms us with purpose, knows our weakness, and restores our humanity through Jesus by reflecting on the concepts of IMAGO DEI and YETZER. (You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)

Featured Scripture

So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them. *Genesis 1:27, AMP*

Lesson

Have you ever paused to ask why—out of all CREATION—God considers humanity worth such extraordinary care, patience, planning, and even repair? The Bible doesn't answer that question with flattery or sentimentality, but with **purpose, design, and love** that began before we ever drew a breath.

King David marveled at this MYSTERY:

"What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of [earthborn] man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.

You made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands..."

(Psalm 8:4–6, AMP)

In another Psalm, David reflects on God's tenderness:

"Just as a father loves his children,

So the Lord loves those who fear and worship Him...

For He knows our [mortal] frame;

He remembers that we are [merely] dust."

(Psalm 103:13–14, AMP)

God entrusts humans with great DIGNITY and responsibility—and at the same time, He remembers our weakness. He knows our limits. This is why Scripture continually invites us to depend on God the way a child depends on a good and trustworthy Father.

Two ideas help us understand this love more deeply: **IMAGO DEI** and the Hebrew word **YETZER**.

Throughout this series we've highlighted the *Shema*:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind... and love your neighbor as yourself." Now we shift our focus to the **affection and VALUE God places on people** within His epic story of love and family.

From the very beginning, God created humans with intention.

"So God created man in His own image,

in the image and likeness of God He created him;

male and female He created them."

(Genesis 1:27, AMP)

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is the name of the Psalmist who marveled at God's mindfulness for man?

Answer: David

2. What is the name of the humble original substance we are compared to? **Answer:**

Dust

3. .What does God give to people in order to care for His creation. **Answer:** Dominion, responsibility, stewardship

4. What does dignity mean to you?

Answer: (Student reflection; e.g. Being valued and worthy of respect.)

5. What might happen if people forgot or disregarded that humans are made in God's image? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "They might treat them poorly and not care about meeting their basic human needs.")

God created you in His own image. This means you are an **image-bearer of God**.

You may have been told you "look like" or "resemble" one of your parents—but God does not have a physical body like ours. He is Spirit. To bear His image means we uniquely REFLECT His **moral, spiritual, creative, and intellectual qualities**. We can reason. We can imagine. We can choose. We can create. We can love.

IMAGO DEI—Latin for "image of God"—has anchored the belief in human dignity, worth, and responsibility for thousands of years. Humans were chosen to represent God's intentions on the earth, and to STEWARD life on this earth well. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Genesis reminds us how this image-bearing life begins:

"Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground.
He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils,
and the man became a living person."
(Genesis 2:7, NLT)

The name *Adam* literally means "one formed from the ground." Like clay shaped from DUST, humanity is both humble and yet created to brim with possibility.

Scripture often returns to this image—God as **POTTER**, humans as **clay**. In Hebrew thought, this shaping of pottery is connected to the word **yetzer**—meaning formation,

inclination, imagination, or inner impulse. God forms our personhood carefully, intentionally, and intimately.

Clay is FRAGILE and dependent—but in the hands of a master potter, it becomes purposeful. A simple clay vessel can carry water, oil, grain, or light. Our fragility does not diminish our worth; it highlights the skill and care of the One who SHAPES us.

“We are the clay, and You are the potter.

We all are formed by Your hand.”

(Isaiah 64:8)

Scripture is also honest about the fracture that entered the story. The **first Adam** represents humanity choosing the enemy’s lies over trusting the One who made them. Relationship broke—but God did not abandon His image in us.

Instead, He ultimately entered our dust-bound world through **Jesus Christ**, often called the **second Adam**—Adam 2.0. Where the first Adam failed, Christ redeemed. He did not erase our humanity; He restored it. In Christ, the image of God is repaired, re-formed, and renewed—*yetzer being restored and saved*.

“The first man, Adam, became a living person.

The last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit...

Just as we are now like the earthly man,

we will someday be like the heavenly man.”

(1 Corinthians 15:45, 49, NLT)

In the meantime, we are invited to join our **image** and our **imagination** to Jesus—to co-create with Him.

“We are like common clay jars that carry this glorious treasure within,

so that this immeasurable power will be seen as God’s, not ours.”

(2 Corinthians 4:7, TPT)

One final insight about **yetzer**: it also refers to our capacity to CHOOSE what occupies our inner thoughts. Inner focus shapes outer life. Nothing is created without first being formed in the mind’s eye.

“Perfect, absolute peace surrounds those whose imaginations (yetzers) are consumed with You, because they confidently trust in You.”

(Isaiah 26:3, TPT)

God gave us the capacity to fix our minds on Him and be filled with His Spirit—not because we are perfect, but because **Jesus restored what it means to be human.**

We are dust—yet dearly loved.

Fragile—yet entrusted.

Clay—yet crowned with glory.

And in Christ, we are being shaped into beloved sons and daughters with great purpose once again.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What language is “Imago Dei,” meaning “image of God”? **Answer:** Latin

2. God is referred to as what kind of craftsman? **Answer:** Potter

3. . Name one or two words that describe “yetzer.” **Answer:** imagination, inclination, impulse, pottery

4. What does it mean to you to trust yourself being formed in the hands of the Potter?

Answer: (Student reflection; e.g. God knows how he wants to make you, and He will give you a purpose and capacity to hold it.)

5. What helps you turn your focus and imagination from worry to God when you need peace? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “Remembering that he knows me and formed me, thinking about His qualities.”)

Context Clues

According to **traditional belief**, God revealed the story of creation to Moses. In this view, Moses didn’t invent the account himself; rather, God **communicated the truths of**

creation, humanity's purpose, and His design to him, either through direct revelation, visions, or oral instruction.

This is why Genesis begins with a clear, intentional account of creation: it isn't just a human story—it is considered **God's perspective on how everything began**, given to Moses to record for the people of Israel.

From a practical standpoint, this means that the creation story in Genesis is seen as **both divine teaching and a foundation for understanding human worth, purpose, and the moral order of the world**—ideas like Imago Dei (bearing God's image) and humans as clay in God's hands flow directly from this revealed knowledge.

Incidentally, the rabbis also believe that God showed Moses the letter forms that would be Hebrew so that he could record the words perfectly and share them with the people. Hebrew was one of the **first fully functional sound-based alphabets**, part of a wave of early alphabetic scripts that moved away from picture-based writing. It was simpler and more flexible than hieroglyphs or cuneiform, making literacy and record-keeping more accessible.

Then & Now

Throughout history, nearly every culture has asked, "How did we get here?" and created stories to explain the origins of the world and humanity. Many of these stories describe gods or spiritual forces forming humans to serve divine purposes or maintain cosmic order.

The creation account in the Hebrew Bible is unique. In Genesis, God is personal, singular, and sovereign, creating intentionally by His word. Humans are made in God's image (Imago Dei), giving them inherent dignity, worth, and creativity. Unlike other ancient accounts, humans are entrusted with stewarding creation and representing God's moral and intellectual nature on the earth.

The discovery of DNA in the mid-1900s transformed our understanding of life. DNA is found in every living thing and functions like an instruction book, guiding how cells grow,

function, and work together. Scientists were struck by how precise, organized, and information-rich this code is.

Because DNA is so complex and purposeful, some scientists believe it points to an intelligent Creator who designed life with intention. This has led some scientists to scrutinize whether Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (small changes over millions of years led to humans) can fully explain life, challenging ideas that have dominated science for the last 150 years. For Christians, science helps explain how life works, while faith explains why life matters—and the discovery of DNA can deepen our awe for the God who we believe created humans with wisdom and care (See Psalm 139).

Memorize: Write this on your heart

We are the clay and You are the potter. Isaiah 64:8

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project's "You're Supposed to Rule the World" (6:16)
<https://youtu.be/YbipxLDtY8c?si=7f9DbdlpTbm8qw6R>
- Watch "Forma Mentis, Forma Mundi—the Creative Power of Yetzer" (6:36)
<https://youtu.be/I5f4wVHIPks?si=G-IXJdS7CDkU9wrO>
- Watch "Context: I Am the Potter" (2:34)
<https://youtu.be/F8tMR-mUE5s?si=Kul6gGezJ4YPB1Lg>
- Watch "DNA as an Evidence for God?" (1:59)
<https://youtu.be/R3OGJdcAsR0?si=OvfoyDw70nSxREA8>
- Listen to the hymn, "All Creatures of Our God and King" (4:30)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF4p9fgAnvQ&list=RDIF4p9fgAnvQ&start_radio=1
- Read the story behind the song "All Creatures of Our God and King" and the song's author:
<https://fbchurch.org/resource/hymnology-all-creatures-of-our-god-and-king>

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellors)

Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of being made in the image of God:

- **Watch the video “Context: I Am the Potter” and write a report about how you feel God has been shaping you.**
 - Think about your personality and purpose. What might your “pot” look like—color, design, function?
 - Give an example of how God has stretched, shaped, reworked, or refined you.

- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about people being made in God’s image or formed in the Potter’s hand.

- **Sensory activity: Make a batch at home or buy some Playdoh and hold it, squish it, knead it, mold it while you reflect on Jeremiah 18:1-4, and then comment on how holding the clay helped you connect with the idea of God as Potter and us as clay.**
 - “God told Jeremiah, “Up on your feet! Go to the potter’s house. When you get there, I’ll tell you what I have to say.” So I went to the potter’s house, and sure enough, the potter was there, working away at his wheel. Whenever the pot the potter was working on turned out badly, as sometimes happens when you are working with clay, the potter would simply start over and use the same clay to make another pot.” Jeremiah 18:1-4 MSG

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

1. CREATION
2. IMAGE
3. IMAGO DEI
4. WORTH
5. DIGNITY
6. PURPOSE
7. CREATOR
8. FATHER
9. DUST
10. CLAY
11. POTTER
12. FORMED
13. IMAGINATION
14. STEWARD
15. AUTHORITY
16. RESPONSIBILITY
17. ADAM
18. REDEEM
19. RESTORE
20. CHRIST



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 4: How Does Sin Block Flow?

Objective

The objective of this lesson is to help students understand how water—essential for physical life in biblical times—serves as a powerful metaphor for spiritual life and the soul. By exploring wells, cisterns, and flowing water in Scripture, students will learn how staying connected to God as the true source of living water brings renewal, while sin and self-reliance disrupt that flow. (You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)

Featured Scripture

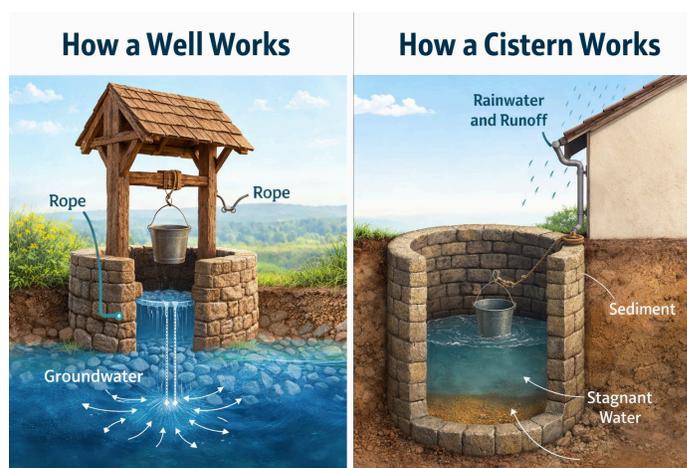
“Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.’” (John 7:38, NLT)

Lesson

When you want WATER today, it's as easy as turning on a faucet or grabbing a bottle from the store. It's hard to imagine that in America, widespread indoor plumbing is less than a hundred years old. For most of human history, water was not instantly accessible—it had to be FETCHED, carried, protected, and conserved. Daily life revolved around it: drinking, cooking, washing clothes, bathing, and watering animals all depended on access to water.

Because of this, cities were intentionally built near rivers, lakes, or reliable springs. In Bible times—and in many places still today—water determined whether civilization could exist at all.

To survive in dry regions, people relied on two main systems: **WELLS** and **CISTERNS**. Wells were dug deep into the earth to tap into spring-fed aquifers—sources of water that were naturally replenished and continually flowing. Cisterns, by contrast, were storage systems carved into rock, something like an ancient rain barrel. They didn't produce water; they merely collected runoff and rain.



Cisterns came with serious problems. Though often plastered to prevent leaks, they **CRACKED** easily, allowing precious water to seep away. Even worse, because the water didn't move, it could become **STAGNANT**. Stagnant water—water that does not flow—was quietly dangerous in the ancient world. People may not have understood germs, but they understood the results. Bad water led to sickness. What was meant to preserve life could slowly poison it.

All of this physical reality becomes a powerful spiritual metaphor.

Scripture tells us our souls are like containers too. A soul that functions like a cistern relies on its own wisdom, effort, coping mechanisms, and temporary fixes. It stores what it can, but nothing **FRESH** is coming in. Over time, the water grows stale.

A soul connected to a living source—to **God Himself**—is entirely different. It is continually replenished, fresh, life-giving, and abundant.

The prophet Jeremiah exposes the tragedy of choosing the wrong system:

“For my people have committed two evils:
They have abandoned Me—
the fountain of living water.

And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns
that can hold no water at all.”
(Jeremiah 2:13, NLT)

Notice the order. The first evil is not behavior—it’s **abandonment**. Walking away from the SOURCE. The second evil naturally follows: trying to replace God with something we can control. Sin creates a broken system—one that was never designed to sustain life. Life needs to be connected to a source.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is one of the main things people need access to in order to live? **Answer:** Water
2. What were two types of containers for water before plumbing? **Answer:** Cistern and well
3. What kind of problems can stagnant water cause? **Answer:** Germs, sickness
4. How can your soul become like a cistern? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Turning to one’s own self for sustenance, but it can only work for so long.)
5. What practices help keep a person connected to God as the source of life? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “Reading the Bible, prayer, worship.”)

Even the Wells Can Stopped Up

In the ancient Near East, wells were so vital that stopping them up was considered an act of aggression. Genesis 26:15 tells us the Philistines became jealous of Isaac’s prosperity and **filled his wells with DIRT**. These weren’t just holes in the ground—they were inherited sources of life, dug by his father Abraham.

Isaac had to move to find new land, digging new wells repeatedly only to face opposition again and again. Thirteen verses describe his FRUSTRATION. But when he finally found space and water flowed freely, he worshiped God.

Sometimes it feels like outside forces—conflict, sin, distraction, fear, oppressive attacks—are trying to block our access to the flow that sustains us. Like Isaac, we can't stop digging. Life depends on it.

Jesus: The Fountain of Living Water

It's no accident that wells, springs, rivers, fountains, and living water appear **over a hundred times** in Scripture. Jesus steps directly into this imagery and makes a bold claim:

"Anyone who is thirsty may come to Me!
Anyone who believes in Me may come and drink!
For the Scriptures declare,
'Rivers of living water will flow from His heart.'
(John 7:37–38, NLT)

At a well in Samaria, Jesus tells a woman who has spent her life drawing water again and again:

"Those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again.
It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them,
giving them eternal life."
(John 4:14, NLT)

Jesus doesn't just offer water—**He is the Fountain**. And because He gives us His Spirit, that living water doesn't just FLOW to us; it flows through us.

Restoring the Flow

Think of the SPIGOT on the side of your house. The water is always available—but it doesn't flow unless you connect a hose and open the valve. Sometimes the connection is loose or the threads are misaligned, and water sprays out sideways. Sometimes there's a kink in the hose, stopping the flow altogether. The solution isn't more water—it's removing the obstruction.

Sin works the same way. Sin—doing what is wrong in God’s eyes or failing to do what is right—**KINKS the line**. It stops the flow. And every one of us has experienced that.

But because Jesus died and rose again, He made a way for the flow to be restored.

Scripture gives us two simple, powerful steps: **CONFESSION and REPENTENCE**.

Confession, from the Greek word *homologeō*, means “to say the same thing.” It is agreeing with God about reality—about His ways, His truth, and His commands. It is alignment. It also means humbly admitting when our lives have not matched that reality, when we have missed the mark.

Repentance (*metanoia*) naturally follows. It is a change of **mind** that leads to a change of direction. We turn away from sin and realign our thinking and actions with the flow of God’s life.

And truthfully, this isn’t a one-time event. It’s a rhythm we return to again and again as God keeps our hearts open and the living water flowing.

“If we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”

(1 John 1:9, NLT)

CLEANSING is a sign that the water is moving again. You can tell that your heart and mind are more at peace with this agreement. (Incidentally, did you know that the word “AMEN” that we often say at the end of our prayers actually means, “Yes, we agree. We stand under this!”?)

God never intended your soul to survive on your own stored-up rainwater. You were designed for a **living source**, for constant renewal, for rivers—not reservoirs.

If the water feels stale, don’t create a better cistern. Return to the Fountain. Where living water flows, life always follows.

This connects right back to the Shema, which has been an anchor for us during this series: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength... and love your neighbor as yourself.” Love God. Love others. Love yourself. This is alignment. This

is agreement. This is an unkinked hose that causes growth. This is being resourced in your very soul by the Fountain, Jesus Christ.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What did the Philistines do to Isaac's wells? **Answer:** DIRT or Filled them with dirt.
2. What did Jesus say was flowing from His heart? **Answer:** RIVERS of living water
3. What two steps does Scripture give for restoring the flow that sin blocked? **Answer:** Confession and repentance
4. How does the story of Isaac's wells connect to spiritual resistance today?
Answer: (Student reflection; e.g. Sometimes it feels like you are doing the right thing and then outside of your control, you get bullied or lose strength.)
5. What does it mean to you to live "resourced in your very soul" by Jesus? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "He provides strength and peace for living life fully.")

Context Clues

In Jesus' time, conquering powers like Rome often reshaped daily life by reshaping **water access**. When the Romans took control of a region, they frequently built **aqueducts** to carry fresh water from distant springs into **city centers**. This was not modern plumbing, but it was revolutionary. Water that once required long daily walks could now flow steadily into public fountains, pools, baths, and markets. Cities grew larger, cleaner, and more stable. Public life expanded because survival took slightly less effort.

Yet this convenience came with a reminder of power. Aqueducts were symbols of Roman control and order—evidence that Rome could command nature itself. Most ordinary people still fetched water by hand, but now they did so in the shadow of arches and channels that proclaimed imperial strength. Against this backdrop, Jesus' language about **living water** carried even greater weight. Rome could deliver water to cities, but

only God could place a spring within the human soul—one that no empire could build, control, or conquer.

Then & Now

In Numbers 21:17, Israel responds to God's provision in the wilderness by singing:

"Spring up, O well! Sing to it!"

Rather than simply drawing water, the people **sing to the source of life**, participating in what God has already given. This act reflects a biblical pattern of addressing the soul—calling it back to trust, hope, and alignment with God.

Modern neuroscience helps explain why this matters. Singing in agreement with a song, even if you just think the words, engages your soul to come alive. Whether in be alone or with a group of people, singing creates agreement, energy and flow. Music can even heal. Dr. Alexander Pantelyat, M.D., a neurologist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Music and Medicine, notes:

"Music... connects to the amygdala, which generates emotional responses, including a release of dopamine... music and the other arts have an important role to play in wellness."

Singing engages the brain's emotional and reward systems, helping regulate mood and restore balance. In this way, singing to the well—and singing to our own souls—becomes both a spiritual and biological act: calling life, movement, and renewal where things may have grown dry. Listening to and learning the song, "Spring Up O Well," based on this Bible verse, might just be a way to get you singing to your own soul to flow! You can sing a song in your mind even if you aren't singing with your mouth.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

"Anyone who is thirsty may come to Me." John 7:37b

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project's "Water of Life" (4:56)
https://youtu.be/PgmAkM39Zt4?si=HNpxs_n1eXi9KWOT
- Watch Bible Project's "What Does It Mean to Sin?" (5:42)
https://youtu.be/aNOZ7ocLD74?si=GSB_MI8JiELElfnZ
- Watch "What is Flow Theory? What Does it Mean for Our Students?" (4:47)
<https://youtu.be/iUsOCR1KKms?si=9yxevnacgCNSH6R2>
- Watch "This Is Your Brain On Music" (6:12)
<https://youtu.be/kZJ8BfEu-P8?si=4NKMFSxNNmV2FK16>
- Listen to the chorus, "Spring Up O Well" (3:11)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJeVbrN5NCc&list=RDGJeVbrN5NCc&start_radio=1
- Read the story behind Spring Up O Well and "Camp Choruses"
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PA1FP4rZzaCKTJUSqwyJHU_PZ_RZnwNt2XMZxUfCtz8/edit?usp=sharing

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of going to God as your fresh and flowing source for life:

- **Write a heartfelt prayer to God about your desire to be connected to the flow of His Spirit.**
 - Think about about how you want your life to function.
 - Think about times that you tried to do things your own way and that you want to know how to do things in agreement with Christ's ways.
- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about the flow or the fountain.

- **Physical activity:** Learn the song “Spring Up O Well” and throughout the week practice the actions that you can learn with your Communication Partner. Here’s a link: <https://youtu.be/i50we-A2c70?si=oxvsRRjLle2-S7sj>
 - Have fun with it! Even if you aren’t able to do the exact movements, just move! Beat a drum! Dance! (But hey, Communication Partners, DO THOSE ACTIONS in front of them!)
 - Write about how it felt in your body to sing and move to this song.

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. WATER | 12. OBEDIENCE |
| 2. WELL | 13. LIVING |
| 3. CISTERN | 14. STREAMS |
| 4. FOUNTAIN | 15. WASTELAND |
| 5. RIVER | 16. RENEWAL |
| 6. FLOW | 17. WORSHIP |
| 7. SOUL | 18. SINGING |
| 8. HEART | 19. JESUS |
| 9. CONFESSION | 20. LIFE |
| 10. REPENTANCE | |
| 11. ALIGNMENT | |



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 5: How Can We Strengthen Ourselves in the Lord?

Objective

The objective of this lesson is to understand that true strength does not come from self-reliance, but from being deeply rooted in God's love. Through Scripture and examples from nature, we will explore how God empowers us with inner strength by His Spirit, how Christ makes His home in us as we trust Him, and how staying connected to Him allows us to remain strong, resilient, and fruitful in every season of life. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong.

Ephesians 3:16-17 NLT

Lesson

Throughout the Bible, God often uses NATURE to help us understand spiritual truths. Jesus often taught using pictures from the natural world—seeds, vines, trees, water, and light. These were not random examples. Creation shows us how spiritual life works. The

same God who designed trees, rivers, and breath also designed our souls to live by staying connected to Him.

Sometimes we think growing stronger means working harder on our own and becoming more independent. But God shows us a different kind of STRENGTH. He empowers us through His Spirit when we stay connected to Him and **depend on His strength**, not just our own. The apostle Paul prayed that believers would “have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the GLORY-STRENGTH God gives” (Colossians 1:11, MSG).

In our last lesson, we talked about the “river of living water.” This river represents God’s life-giving presence that sustains and cleanses us. But Jesus reminds us that we must come to Him and CONNECT to that living water. If we only follow our own plans or act out of fear, pride, or self-protection, we miss the life He offers. We can feel weak, stuck and unable to grow.

Today, we will look at another picture from nature that the Bible uses to describe strength and life: a tree. A **SIMILE** is a figure of speech that compares two different things using words like *like* or *as*. Scripture says people who trust God are **like trees**.

Jeremiah 17:7–8 says:

“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. **They are like trees planted along a riverbank**, with ROOTS that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.”

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What nature image is used to signify strength in this lesson? **Answer:** Tree
2. What is it called when two different things are compared using the word *like* or *as*?
Answer: Simile
3. What kind of problems can happen if we disconnect from Jesus and follow our own plans? **Answer:** Weak, stuck, unable to grow

4. What is one way you are “like a tree”? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Resilient when times get tough, connected to a source.)

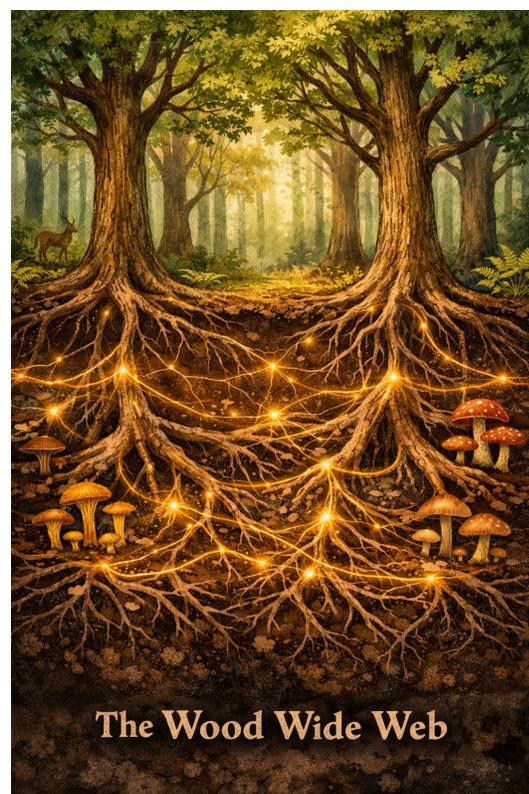
5. How is “glory-strength” different from “gritting your teeth” strength? Do you have an example from your own life? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “Glory strength feels like you are just not having to work so hard to stay committed to seeing something through.”)

Have you ever stopped and really looked at trees? If God says we are like something, it is worth learning more about it. **Science—the study of the natural world—has shown us amazing things about trees.** In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben explains that trees live in connected communities. They can share nutrients, send warning signals, and help weaker trees survive. Underground, FUNGAL networks connect tree roots in what he calls the “Wood Wide Web.” This works almost like a natural internet, helping trees support one another. People are a lot like that, wouldn’t you say?

Trees that grow near rivers are especially strong. They are built to survive intense winds, flooding, and HARSH weather. To do this, they grow deep, wide root systems that hold them firmly in place and help them reach water even during hard seasons.

The Bible gives us a powerful example of this kind of strength in David’s life before he became king of Israel. In 1 Samuel 30, David experienced one of the worst moments of his life. His city was destroyed. Families and possessions were taken. Even his own men turned against him. The Bible says David was “extremely distressed.” But instead of giving up, “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”

David did not pretend everything was okay. Instead, he chose to turn toward God instead of staying stuck in fear and hopelessness. Strengthening himself in the Lord meant



going back to the One who could hold him together when everything else was falling apart. God then guided David and helped him RECOVER all of what was lost—and then some!

David did not just try to hype himself up. He knew his strength had to come from being **in** the Lord. Jesus explained this idea clearly in John 15:5 when He said He is the VINE and we are the BRANCHES. When we stay connected to Him, we bear fruit. When we are disconnected, we lose our source of life and strength. “Apart from Me, you can do nothing,” He said.

Like strong trees, Jesus wants our roots to grow deep in Him. The Bible even gives us a picture of what that can look like inside our souls—like a GARDEN full of life, similar to the Garden of Eden, where God’s life flows like a river and produces good fruit from the “Tree of Life.”

The apostle Paul prayed this for believers who were facing stress and persecution: “I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong” (Ephesians 3:16–17).

Practically speaking, what do you think a person who is like a well-rooted tree would be like? Maybe they would:

- Feel stress but not be defined by it.
- Draw life from God, instead of being weakened and overtaken by circumstances.
- Know that hard seasons are remembered and marked but are not permanent.
- Share their resources with others who need strength.
- GROW and produce good fruit (like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control).

We have been tracking with the Shema Jewish prayer that Jesus said be a sure way to stay connected with God. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength... and love your neighbor as yourself.” Encouraging your own soul to stay and

REMAIN in this kind of connection with the God who made you will be rewarded with strength. When we are weak, He is strong in us.

One great scripture to learn to remind yourself that you are not left powerless is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

You were truly built to be strong, RESILIENT, faithful, and resourceful to yourself and others. Stay in Christ and you will get stronger and stronger in His mighty power that works through you!

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is the study of the natural world called? **Answer:** Science
2. What is the Wood Wide Web similar to in our world today? **Answer:** World Wide Web, internet
3. Who "strengthened himself in the Lord" when things looked bad? **Answer:** David
4. Name one example of what the Bible calls a "spiritual fruit"? **Answer:** Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and self-control.
5. How have you sensed an interconnected information and resource web with your real friends or family, kind of like the trees have? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "You think about someone and send out prayers for them to be strengthened.)
6. What does it mean to be strong without pretending everything is okay? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. "We can be honest about our situation before God and others without becoming hopeless or shrinking back.")

Context Clues

The Bible begins with humanity in a garden. In the Garden of Eden stands the **Tree of Life**, a symbol of life that flows directly from God Himself. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost access to that tree. From that moment on, the Old Testament tells the true

story of people longing to be restored—to live again in strength, wholeness, and fruitfulness in God’s presence.

In the New Testament, Jesus fulfills the meaning of the Tree of Life by becoming the **source of life Himself**. He declares, “I am the life,” and “I am the true vine,” revealing that real, abundant, and eternal life is found in relationship with Him. Jesus is not merely pointing to the Tree of Life as a symbol—**He is the Tree of Life**, embodied in a person.

Jesus is then brutally crucified on a Roman wooden cross—another kind of tree. Remarkably, more than 1,500 years earlier, the Old Testament had declared, “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*” (Deuteronomy 21:23). By dying on the cross, Jesus takes the curse upon Himself and transforms the tree of death into the **Tree of Life**. What was lost in Eden is restored in Christ, who reopens the way to life with God. As 1 Peter 2:24 says, “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*”

Throughout the Old Testament, there are many moments where events, people, and objects point forward to Jesus long before He ever lived. This is known as **FORESHADOWING** and **symbolism**. Many of these connections were not fully understood until after Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Looking back through the lens of Christ, we can now see how these threads run from Genesis to Revelation—woven together across more than 1,500 years by over 40 different authors—telling one unified story of redemption and restored life with God.

Then & Now

Proverbs 3:18 says, “*Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.*” Interestingly, science has discovered that our brains also contain **tree-like structures** that grow as we learn and experience life. These structures are called **DENDRITES**.

Dr. **Caroline Leaf**, a neuroscientist who studies how the brain works, explains that thoughts are not just abstract ideas—they are **real, physical processes in the brain**. When you think in certain ways repeatedly, your brain builds physical pathways for those thoughts. Dr. Leaf describes these pathways as looking much like trees, with **roots, a**

trunk, and branches. The roots come from experiences and memories, while the branches represent the emotions, choices, and reactions connected to those thoughts.

According to Dr. Leaf, **healthy thoughts**—such as truth, hope, gratitude, and love—form strong, organized “trees” in the brain. These help us think more clearly, regulate our emotions, and recover from difficulties. In contrast, **toxic thoughts**, like fear, self-lies, or constant worry, grow into disorganized, weaker structures that can leave us feeling stressed or overwhelmed. The encouraging news is that the brain can change. When we become aware of unhealthy thinking and intentionally replace it with healthier thoughts, it’s like **pruning an unhealthy tree so a stronger one can grow**. Over time, the brain becomes more resilient—much like a well-rooted tree planted near water.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

“Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.” Ephesians 3:17b

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project’s “We Studied the Tree of Life in the Bible” (4:52)
<https://youtu.be/TJLan-pJzfQ?si=FjVeJ9kngM8nuVTE>
- Watch “David at Ziklag: From Despair to Destiny” (8:16)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIBBFAAy3R4>
- Watch “Secret Language of Trees” (4:34)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4m9SefyRjg>
- Listen to the hymn, “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” (2:50)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xjh0e5WDVQ>
- Read the story behind the hymn “Just a Closer Walk With Thee”
<https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/just-a-closer-walk-with-thee/>
- Watch Caroline Leaf’s short “Your Thoughts Aren’t Just Ideas” (1:22)
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1393962442136406>

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

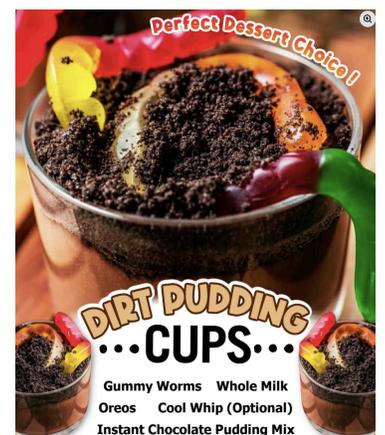
Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of going to God as your fresh and flowing source for life:

- **Finish-the-thought prompts. Fill in the blanks with your own words.**
 - “Being rooted means _____.”
 - “The way I experience connecting with others even without words is _____.”
 - “Sharing strength looks like _____.”
 - “I find that my mind becomes stronger when _____.”
 - “An example of a time when I strengthened myself in the Lord is _____.”

- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about strength and trees.

- **Report**
 - Listen to the hymn “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” and read about the story. Research a little more about “Negro Spirituals” and how they used these songs to strengthen themselves while working in the fields during slavery. What did you learn?

- **Physical activity: Make Edible Dirt Cups**
 - Spell each ingredient: MILK, PUDDING, WHIPPED TOPPING, OREOS, GUMMY WORMS and make the recipe together. (Look up “Dirt Cups”).



Spelling Words to Practice This Week

1. NATURE
2. STRENGTH
3. CONNECT
4. SIMILE
5. ROOTS
6. FUNGAL
7. HARSH
8. RECOVER
9. VINE
10. BRANCHES
11. GARDEN
12. GROW
13. REMAIN
14. RESILIENT
15. TRUST
16. EMPOWER
17. RESOURCES
18. SPIRIT
19. FRUITFUL
20. CONNECTED

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WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 6: How Does Trust Protect Our Relationships with God and People?

Objective

Students will understand that trust is the foundation that holds their lives steady and that true stability comes from placing the full weight of their lives on Jesus, the solid Rock. Through Peter's story and Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:24–26, students will reflect on their own trust struggles, recognize how fear can shake their foundation, and discover that trust can be rebuilt through relationship with Christ—not performance. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. **Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.** Isaiah 26:3-4 ESV

Lesson

We all deal with TRUST issues at some point, and that's unsettling. Maybe it's trusting a teacher to really see you—not just your performance, your behavior, or your struggles—but your effort and your heart. Maybe it's trusting a parent to actually understand what you're feeling instead of just managing what they see on the outside.

Maybe it's trusting a friend not to turn on you when it's inconvenient. Or maybe it's trusting God when life feels confusing, UNFAIR, or nothing like you thought it would be.

So what is trust, really?

Trust is that settled confidence that someone will be consistent, keep their promises, and actually come through. It's the feeling that something will hold when you put your weight on it. Trust is foundational and reliable. It's built way beneath the visible parts of your life—beneath your choices, your relationships, your confidence. When trust is STRONG, you feel stable. When it's shaky, everything feels uncertain.

When Jesus stepped into history 2,000 years ago, He walked into a world full of skeptical, beat-down people who were always bracing for the next bad thing. And what did He do? He started rebuilding trust. Over and over, His message was simple: Your Father in Heaven cares. You can trust Him with your whole life.

Philippians 2:6–8 says that Jesus, though He existed in the form of God, emptied Himself and became HUMAN. He stepped into vulnerability. Into pressure. Into temptation. He knows what it feels like to be misunderstood, stressed, and exhausted. Yet He trusted the Father completely and obeyed Him. He didn't just tell us to trust—He MODELED it.

Jesus often used PARABLES—earthly, everyday stories with heavenly meanings—to reveal truth to those who would want to understand it. He talked about things like dirt, rivers, trees, and rocks to paint a picture of His Kingdom ways. At one point Jesus said, “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock” (Matthew 7:24, NLT). And that image wasn't random. Before His ministry, Jesus likely worked as a carpenter, but more so like a builder of stone structures. Not just a guy sanding wood in a shop—but someone shaping and laying heavy stones to build houses that could last for generations.

He continues, “Anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't OBEY it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand” (Matthew 7:26, NLT). Same storm. Same rain. Different foundation.

So here's a question for you: when pressure hits your life—drama, disappointment, anxiety, inadequacy—what are you standing on? What actually holds you steady?

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is it called when you feel confident that something or someone is reliable?

Answer: Trust

2. What is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning called? **Answer:** Parable

3. What is the difference between rock and sand in Jesus' example of building a house?

Answer: Rock is stable, sand is shifting

4. What does it take for you to know you can trust someone? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. They keep their promises, and they make me feel understood.)

5. What storm feels most real in your life right now? **Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. A personal trial.)

Now enter Peter.

PETER was one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples. His original name was Simon (Shimon), which comes from the word *shema*, meaning "to hear" or "to listen." (Sound familiar? The **Shema prayer** is one we have been referencing throughout this series, and it is all about **loving God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength.**) But Jesus gives Simon a new name that moves him from a posture of curiosity to a holding a SOLID stance: "Peter"—which means "ROCK" or "stone."

Here's the interesting part: Peter was anything but steady at first. He was passionate but impulsive. Bold but stubborn. Deeply sincere but constantly wrestling with doubt. He wasn't even sure that Jesus was fully able to be trusted. Jesus didn't rename him based on who he was in that moment. He named him based on who he was BECOMING.

Have you ever thought about that? That Jesus might see something in you that you haven't grown into yet?

Trusting Jesus isn't just agreeing with Him. It's putting the full weight of your life on Him. And Peter had to learn that the hard way.

Jesus once took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi—a place filled with pagan worship, idols carved into a massive rock cliff, and a deep cave people called the “Gates of Hell.” [Read Matthew 16:13-20]. It was not the kind of place devoted Jewish religious people should hang out at. And right there, in front of that giant rock face and all those false gods and worship and sacrifices being offered up to them, Jesus asked, **“Who do YOU say that I am?”**



Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” This was a throw down in front of all these other gods who were really demons. He is God, and not them. Jesus IS God and He will defeat all that is bringing spiritual death to humanity.

And Jesus responds by affirming Peter's name and Jesus' claim: on this “rock”—this CONFESSION of who Jesus is—He would build His church, and even the gates of death and hell would not overcome it.

The setting matters. In front of literal rock and symbolic darkness, Jesus announces an unshakable Kingdom. And Peter is called “Rock” before he ever proves he deserves it.

But not long after that bold moment, everything falls apart. Jesus is arrested. Chaos erupts. Peter panics. The same guy who just publicly declared Jesus as Messiah DENIES even knowing Him. Three times.

Have you ever had a moment where your fear overpowered your faith? Where you believed one thing in theory—but acted differently when pressure hit?

Peter's trust fractures. He doesn't just lose trust in the situation. He likely loses trust in himself. Shame sets in. And here's what we learn: being called a rock does not mean

being unbreakable. It means being tested. Trust is often most fragile when we are afraid.

But the story doesn't end there.

After the resurrection, Jesus meets Peter again. Three times He asks, **"Do you love me?"**—mirroring the three denials. It's not a pop quiz. It's HEALING. Each question gently restores what fear had broken. And only after restoring relationship does Jesus say, **"Feed my sheep."** Jesus wants Peter to shepherd and disciple others in His Name. Can you imagine how it would have felt to know that Jesus still trusted in *you*?

Notice this: Peter is rebuilt through love, not performance. Jesus doesn't say, "Prove yourself." He says, "Stay connected to me. Build on Me."

Peter goes on to lead courageously for decades. The impulsive fisherman becomes a STEADY leader. Eventually he writes in 1 Peter 2:4–6 (TPT):

"So keep coming to him who is the Living Stone—though he was rejected and discarded by men but chosen by God and is priceless in God's sight. Come and be his 'living stones'... And whoever believes in him will certainly not be disappointed."

Peter learned something powerful: the only way to become steady is to stay connected to the true Rock. And you can trust you won't be disappointed.

So what does this mean for you?

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What was Peter's original name? **Answer:** Simon
2. What does the name "Peter" mean? **Answer:** Rock/Stone
3. What does it mean to "put the full weight of your life" on Jesus? **Answer:** Trust in Him, rely on His solid foundation.

4. How do you feel that Jesus sees you as being more than you are today? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. He calls me strong when I feel weak.)

5. These days, do you relate more to Simon (learning to listen) or Peter (trying to be strong and stable in your convictions)? **Why? Answer:** (Student reflection e.g. “I am more like Simon right now, learning to listen and understand.”)

Context Clues

NAME MEANINGS AND NAME CHANGES

In the Bible, having your name changed was a really big deal. It wasn't just about picking a new label—it showed a new identity, a new purpose, or a change in the way God wanted you to live. Names in Hebrew culture carried meaning. They weren't just what people called you; your name often reflected your character, your life story, or even the way your life would unfold.

For example:

- **Abram** → **Abraham**: Abram meant “Exalted Father,” but God renamed him Abraham, which means “Father of Many Peoples.” This change came when God promised Abraham a son and a family line that would become many nations. His identity shifted because of God's promise and plan.
- **Sarai** → **Sarah**: Sarai's name changed to Sarah, meaning “Princess,” when God promised she would be the mother of nations. Her new name reflected her new role and the blessing God gave her.
- **Jacob** → **Israel**: Jacob originally meant “Heel Grabber” or “Deceiver” because he had tricked his brother Esau to get ahead. But after wrestling with an angel (Genesis 32:22–32) and learning about God's blessing, his name was changed to Israel, meaning “He Fights with God.” His new name reminded him that he could live differently—by God's power, not by his own schemes.
- **Simon** → **Peter**: In the New Testament, Jesus renamed Simon “Peter,” which means “Rock” (Matthew 16:15–19). This wasn't because Simon was perfect—he was impulsive, bold, and sometimes stubborn—but because God saw who he

could become. Peter's new name symbolized the strong, steady leader he would grow into, and it was tied to his confession that Jesus is the Messiah.

Name changes in the Bible usually happen after a person meets God in a powerful way. It could be a promise, a challenge, or a moment of revelation that changes their character, purpose, or identity. When God meets a person, their life—and their story—changes forever.

Then & Now

Biblical archaeology is a specialized field of archaeology focused on uncovering and studying the material remains of ancient civilizations in the lands and time periods described in the Bible—such as buildings, tools, inscriptions, pottery, and settlements—to better understand the historical and cultural context in which the biblical events took place. It seeks to recover and interpret evidence from the **Ancient Near East and Holy Land** that relates to the people, places, and practices mentioned in Scripture.

Biblical archaeology matters because it helps ground the stories of Scripture in **real places, real objects, and real human lives**, reminding us that the events of the Bible didn't happen in a vacuum but in space and time. By uncovering ancient homes, tools, and city remains, archaeology connects the biblical text with the **material world**—the actual contexts in which people like the disciples lived and worked, ate and fished, worshiped and traveled. Dr. Clifford Wilson, former director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology said, "I know of no finding in archaeology that's properly confirmed which is in opposition to the Scriptures. The Bible is the most accurate history textbook the world has ever seen."

Beyond mere facts, digging into the past makes the Bible come alive—engaging our curiosity, grounding our faith in history and geography, and even building fellowship among those who explore these ancient worlds together.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

“And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.” 1 Peter 2:5a NLT

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch Bible Project’s “The Two Houses” (2:59)
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/matthew-7-24-27-two-houses/>
- Watch “Christ’s Kingdom Stands: Caesarea Philippi” (4:09)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEQyABNS6Cg>
- Listen to the hymn, “The Solid Rock” (4:53)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoPcyr2oYhg&list=RDWoPcyr2oYhg&start_radio=1
- Read the story behind the hymn “The Solid Rock”
<https://www.staugustine.com/story/lifestyle/faith/2015/09/10/story-behind-song-solid-rock/16264474007/>
- Watch “The Importance of Biblical Archaeology (4:44)
https://youtu.be/Kiix_ih2B8U?si=YtnsRVvMkt3WVVZT

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of the following ways to demonstrate your understanding of trust:

- **WHAT’S IN A NAME?** To the Hebrews, names held distinct meaning. Look up the meaning of the name your parents gave to you and ask them why they chose that name. Write a report about how your name fits you, or if you think God wants to give you a second “spiritual” name that fits how He sees you. What would it be?
 - Look up your name on this website: <https://www.behindthename.com/>
- **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**

-
- Write a poem or song about trust and rocks.

 - **What Holds Me Steady Writing Prompts. Make a list of what can build a solid foundation of trust:**
 - A person I trust
 - A promise from Scripture
 - A truth I come back to
 - A place I feel calm
 - A strength I have
 - A reminder I need when afraid

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

- | | |
|-----------|----------------|
| 1. TRUST | 11. FEAR |
| 2. ROCK | 12. FIRM |
| 3. SAND | 13. STRONG |
| 4. STORM | 14. STONE |
| 5. PEACE | 15. FOUNDATION |
| 6. FAITH | 16. CONFESSION |
| 7. HOPE | 17. MESSIAH |
| 8. LOVE | 18. DISCIPLE |
| 9. BUILD | 19. RESTORE |
| 10. HOUSE | 20. PRESSURE |



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 7: How Does Jesus Partner With Us?

Objective

Students will understand that when Jesus says in Matthew 11:29 to “take my yoke,” He is inviting them into a partnership with Him—learning His way, aligning their heart, mind, soul, and strength with His leadership—so they can experience both purposeful work and true rest for their souls. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:29, NIV

Lesson

From the time that we were being formed in our mother’s womb, God saw and imagined our unique PURPOSE and potential. Jesus came into this world not just to save us *from* the things that can hold us back; we are saved *for* something that has eternal value. God invites us into real WORK in His kingdom — again, not just *for* Jesus, but *with* Jesus.

1 Corinthians 3:9 says, “We are co-laborers with God.” That word “co-laborers” in Greek (synergoi) is where we get the English word “synergy” from. SYNERGY is a great word. It

means “the working together of two or more things to produce a greater effect than the sum of their individual parts.” It’s like $1+1=3$. This is power!

When we obey the commands of the Shema prayer, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength...**,” we are saying that we understand that every part of who we are belongs to Him in interdependence. But here’s the honest truth: sometimes we don’t like being led. We want to decide our own DIRECTION. We want to move at our own pace. We have to be trained in order to follow.

When we rush ahead or pull away, life can feel messy and exhausting. Our steps lose order, and we become vulnerable and ineffective. Jesus knows this about us. That’s why He gives us a powerful picture from everyday life in Bible times – the picture of a yoke. Not to be confused with an egg Y-O-L-K! This is a Y-O-K-E, and it’s a piece of farm equipment.

In Matthew 11:28–30, NLT, Jesus says, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”



To understand this, we need to picture farming long before tractors existed. Farmers used OXEN to plow fields. A wooden yoke was placed across the shoulders of two oxen to join them together so they could pull in the same direction. **Often, a young, inexperienced ox would be yoked to an older, stronger, trained ox.** The older ox knew the farmer’s voice. It knew how to walk straight lines and keep steady RHYTHM. The younger ox might pull too fast, slow down, or veer off – but the yoke kept them connected.

Over time, the young ox learned the rhythm and strength of the older one. The work was shared. The BURDEN felt lighter because it wasn’t carried alone. The Message

translation of Matthew 11:29 says it so eloquently: **“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”**

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. Who saw you before you were born? **Answer:** God
2. What farm object did Jesus use as an example of partnership? **Answer:** Yoke
3. Why would a farmer yoke a younger ox to an older ox? **Answer:** The older one trained the younger because it already knew how to walk straight and keep rhythm.
4. What does it mean to you to co-labor with Jesus? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Ask for what His will is for a situation and obey His leading.)
5. What’s an example in your life from the past week when you sensed the “unforced rhythms of grace,” even for a moment?” **Answer:** (Student reflection)

In Jesus’ day, a rabbi’s teaching was also called his “yoke.” To follow a rabbi meant to take on his way of understanding and living out God’s Word. When Jesus says, “Take my yoke,” He is inviting us to learn His way of life – His mercy, humility, courage, and obedience. His teaching is not harsh or crushing. It brings FREEDOM because it lines us up with truth.

This idea of alignment shows up in Proverbs 16:3 and is expounded upon in the Amplified translation: “Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.” AGREEMENT. Alignment. Rhythm. Pace. Synergy. This is what partnering with Jesus looks like. This is what “rest for your soul” feels like!

There is even a beautiful picture of this in the Hebrew language. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is called *Aleph* (a silent letter), and in ancient Paleo-Hebrew pictogram, which is made up of PICTURES that represent letters, it was shaped like an **ox head**. (Hebrew also reads right to left instead of left to right like English.) Strength.

Leadership. The name for God, *EI*, is made up of *ALEPH* (ox head) and *Lamed* (which was shaped like a shepherd's staff). Together, the picture looks like strength guided by a SHEPHERD — authority carried with care. Isaiah 9:4 calls a yoke a “staff across the shoulder.” God is strong, but He is also a shepherd who guides. That is the kind of partner Jesus is.



The New Testament tells us that Christ is the head and we are the BODY. A body does not decide its own direction apart from the head. The head leads; the body follows. When we love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, we are choosing to move in step with our Head. We are choosing partnership instead of stubborn independence.

Practically speaking, that might mean we change our posture, like:

- Pause and ask, “Jesus, what are You doing in this situation, and how should I join You?”
- When you do mess up, partnership reminds you, “I will bring this to Jesus quickly and make this right.”
- Choose faithful obedience again and again, rather than fitful starts and stops.
- Doing your part in taking responsibility for what only you can do, and trusting Jesus that He is in control of the rest.

Jesus wants to know our IDEAS and desires. We bring our own strengths and personalities and gifts with us when we come to Him. He invites us into His yoke — His teaching, His pace, His strength. When we accept that invitation, we discover that we were never meant to pull the plow alone. We were meant to walk beside Him, learning His rhythm of grace, bringing life and a HARVEST wherever He leads, and seeing that He loves it when our ideas succeed as we seek His help and guidance first.

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. In Jesus' day, what was another word for a rabbi's teaching? **Answer:** Yoke
2. What shape did the letter Aleph look like in ancient Hebrew? **Answer:** Ox head

3. Why would alignment bring freedom instead of pressure? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. You can multiply the power when you work in unison with another.)

4. How do you think that “work” and “rest for your soul” can co-exist? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. It feels good to be able to be productive and not frustrated.)

5. What are some plans you have that you think God might want to see come to fruition? **Answer:** (Student reflection.)

Context Clues

THE RABBI'S YOKE

The title of “rabbi” was a respectful one given to someone trained in interpreting and teaching God’s Law, or the Torah. It was someone who taught with authority. In Bible times, a rabbi’s “yoke” referred to his interpretation of the Law—his particular way of understanding and living out the Torah. To take on a rabbi’s yoke meant becoming his disciple: submitting to his teaching, imitating his life, and ordering your daily actions according to his instruction.

By the time of Jesus, some groups—like the Pharisees—had developed detailed traditions to guard the Law. These added layers of rules about Sabbath, purity, and daily practices. Though meant to protect obedience, the growing weight of regulations could feel overwhelming. They seemed to lose the spirit or intention behind following the ways of God. Jesus even spoke of leaders who placed “heavy burdens” on others.

So when He says in Matthew 11:29–30, “Take *my* yoke upon you... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light,” He offers a contrast. His yoke still calls for discipleship and obedience, but it is light because it is rooted in relationship, mercy, and grace rather than rule accumulation.

Then & Now

Thousands of years ago, writing began as pictures. Early people carved pictograms on cave walls—simple images that stood for objects or events. But pictures could only go so far.

Over time, some symbols began to represent *sounds* instead of just things. The **Paleo-Hebrew alphabet** grew out of earlier pictographic symbols—like an ox head that eventually stood for the sound “aleph.” This sound-based approach was refined in the **Phoenician alphabet**, passed into the **Greek alphabet**, and then into the **Latin alphabet**, which English still uses today.

Attaching letters to sounds was an elegant breakthrough. Instead of thousands of symbols, you only needed a small set of letters that could be combined to form endless words. Writing could move from cave walls to scrolls to bound books.

The Bible was copied carefully by hand for centuries, letter by letter, long before mass production existed. Widespread distribution didn’t happen until **Johannes Gutenberg** invented the printing press in the 1400s, making it possible to reproduce texts quickly and share them widely.

From carved pictures to printed pages, the alphabet’s story is the story of turning sound into something that can last.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

“For we are co-laborers with God.” 1 Corinthians 3:9a

Letter Name	Proto-Sinaitic	Early Phoenician	Greek	Phonetic Value	Letter Meaning
’aleph			Α	[ʾ]	ox
beth			Β	[b]	house
gimmel			Γ	[g]	throwstick
daleth			Δ	[d]	door
he			Ε	[h]	
waw			Ϝ, Υ	[w]	hook/peg
zayin			Ζ	[z]	
heth			Η	[ħ]	fence
teth			Θ	[t]	
yodh			Ι	[y]	arm/hand
kaph			Κ	[k]	palm of hand
lamedh			Λ	[l]	goad/crook
mem			Μ	[m]	water
nun			Ν	[n]	snake
samekh			Ξ	[s]	
’ayin			Ο	[ʿ]	eye
pe			Π	[p]	
tsade			Μ ²	[s]	
qoph			Ϙ ³	[q]	
reš			Ρ	[r]	head
šin			Σ	[š]	
taw			Τ	[t]	mark (?)

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch “What Does it Mean When Jesus Says My Yoke Is Easy...” (4:00)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW7YwIpeOzw>
- Watch “Take My Yoke Upon You...” (1:44)
<https://youtu.be/TIrcIas3k54?si=neVvkZmXbJlw6oaM>
- Watch “Oxen Training” (2:46)
https://youtu.be/PBftjJ05qMg?si=GqkTR8f0npJh_JUv
- Watch “A History of Hebrew: Proto-Semitic Alphabet” (3:10)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TF0QQ1ptsl>
- Listen to the hymn, “Trust and Obey” (4:53)
https://youtu.be/Noyy-0hIjPw?si=_zH8jTkWR8uB9EYS
- Read the story behind the hymn “Trust and Obey”
<https://iblp.org/hymn-history-trust-and-obey/>
- Watch “Cognitive Load Theory” (2:54)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UpA6RdE0aYo>
- Watch Heartmath’s “Social Coherence Explained” (3:23)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8Eyr_IDvBI

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of these ways to demonstrate your understanding of the yoke:

- **“Co-labor” with Your Communication Partner to Build a Story Together**
 - The communication partner and student each add **one sentence at a time**, taking turns to build a story. Start with the communication partner setting it up. I.e. *“Once upon a time, a young ox wanted to learn how to plow.”*
 - They must **connect their sentence to the one before**, keeping the story coherent.
 - Encourage imagination, but keep it positive or relevant to the lesson (e.g., partnership, learning, rhythm, rest, or working together).

-
- Communication partners, here's a challenge for you: YOU spell out each letter of your sentence on the letterboard or the keyboard too!
 - Record your short story (showing what sentence belongs to whom) and turn it in, along with the student's comment on how that felt to build a story that way with another person.

 - **Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics**
 - Write a poem or song about being yoked with Christ, partnership, or rest for your soul.

 - **Fill-in the Blank Madlib (Spell the Word)**

The Story:

One day, a/an (adjective) ox named (name) was paired with a/an (adjective) ox named (name). Their job was to (verb) the (plural noun) across the field.

At first, (name) wanted to go (direction), but (name) knew the rhythm of the (plural noun) and gently (verb). Together, they discovered that when they moved in (adjective) steps, the work became (adjective) and (emotion).

They realized that being yoked together meant they could (verb) more (adverb) than they could alone. By the end of the day, both oxen felt (emotion), and their (body part) were full of (plural noun).

They learned the secret of co-laboring: when you (verb) together, the burden is (adjective), the rhythm is (adjective), and even the hardest (plural noun) becomes (adjective).

Need a guide to the parts of speech?

https://www.butte.edu/departments/cas/tipsheets/grammar/parts_of_speech.html

- **Broom Handle “Yoke” Rhythm Walk**

- Grab a broom handle (or a dowel/long stick) and find an open space to walk safely. Partners hold the broom handle together at chest height side by side. Communication partner sets the pace and the course and the Speller follows. Focus on matching one another’s steps and pace. Set a metronome if you can. Try to walk in step for a few minutes.
- Spell a word or a sentence about how that felt.

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. JESUS | 11. GOD |
| 2. YOKE | 12. PURPOSE |
| 3. DISCIPLE | 13. MERCY |
| 4. PARTNER | 14. HUMBLE |
| 5. LAW | 15. OBEY |
| 6. GRACE | 16. FREEDOM |
| 7. SOUL | 17. RHYTHM |
| 8. STRENGTH | 18. HARVEST |
| 9. REST | 19. ALEPH |
| 10. WORK | 20. SHEPHERD |



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 8: What Does it Mean to Live in God's Kingdom Paradigm?

Objective

Students will understand what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God and how it is different from the kingdoms of this world. Students will see that Jesus came to rescue our souls from darkness and invite us to live as part of His kingdom of light by loving God, others and ourselves in the way Jesus showed us. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

Your **hearts can soar** with joyful gratitude when you think of how **God made you worthy** to receive the glorious **inheritance** freely given to us by **living in the light**. **He has rescued us completely** from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has **translated us into the kingdom realm** of his beloved Son. Colossians 1:12-13, TPT

Lesson

We've come to our final lesson in this series about our SOULS. I hope you've noticed something important: Jesus used images from everyday life—such as sheep, clay, rivers, wells, trees, rocks, oxen, and fields—to help people understand spiritual life as something intimate, relational, and interdependent. God's TRUTH isn't meant to be

complicated—it's meant to bring us back into harmony with God, with others, and with the way we were created to live in the first place.

Out of extravagant love, God sent His Son into the world—not to condemn it for messing things up—but to SAVE it through Him (John 3:17). He showed we were worth it, and He made us worthy of being cared for as sons and daughters of God!

And what did Jesus talk about more than anything? “The KINGDOM.” “Kingdom” comes from the idea of a king’s domain, or the space, people and reality that are under a ruler’s reign, or influence.

In the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the phrase “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” appears over 100 times, mostly from Jesus Himself. It was the CENTER of His message. His first recorded public words in Mark were: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news.”

Jesus—the King of Glory—came humbly as a man. He showed us what God is like. He died to rescue us from the separation sin brings. He rose again to give us new life and PURPOSE, now and forever. But He doesn’t force His rule on anyone. **We choose to believe Him and we confess, “Jesus is my Lord,” aligning our hearts and actions with His kingdom.**

You may have heard the phrase *paradigm shift*. That means a completely new way of seeing the world. When Jesus began His ministry at age 30, He didn’t just introduce a new idea—He changed HISTORY forever. Roughly 8 billion people have become Christians, and the way His followers treated people with dignity and physical care was very distinct from the culture. His one life on the timeline of human history even inspired a new calendar to be made that split time into BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, “In the Year of our Lord”).

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What topic did Jesus talk more about than anything? **Answer:** The kingdom
2. Name one of the four Gospels? **Answer:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

3. Out of what you have learned through the lessons utilizing sheep, clay pottery, rivers, wells, trees, rocks, oxen, or fields, which was the most memorable for you, and why?

Answer: (Student reflection.)

4. Jesus doesn't force His rule on anyone. Why do you think you are allowed the choice of inviting Him to be your Lord? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. He wants you to want to love Him, not demand it.)

5. What is one way that Jesus shifted the paradigm on how people were typically treated in society that is meaningful to you? **Answer:** (Student reflection)

Some people murmured that Jesus was just the carpenter's son from Nazareth, but yet He spoke about God as His Father and talked about bringing "GOOD NEWS." **In those days, "good news" (or gospel) was a royal announcement—like saying a new king had taken the throne.**

But the people were confused. Jewish people in the first century were living under Roman rule. Rome taxed them heavily and crushed rebellion. Many hoped for a Messiah (anointed and appointed king) like King David who would physically defeat Rome and restore Israel's power and former glory. Instead, they had Jewish regional rulers like Herod Antipas, appointed by Rome, and Jewish religious leaders that ran the temple and were tied closely to POLITICS. **The "kingdom" they experienced felt heavy and discouraging.**

Into that world, Jesus brought something totally different and unexpected. It was not a physical kingdom, but an invisible kingdom.

Actually, it wasn't just a paradigm shift—it was more like an *ecology* shift. **ECOLOGY means how living things relate to one another and their environment.** In nature, everything works together to create life and growth. It's like a whole ecosystem that thrives together.

Jesus described God's kingdom like an ecology where life works together in harmony, built around ideas like family, friends, fields, and feasts. He said, "Seek the Kingdom of

God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33, NLT).

This kingdom wasn't just a far-off castle in the clouds for some far-off day. Jesus collected average men (and women) to be His disciples and close friends as He spread the Good News, and taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He said the kingdom is “near you” and “in your midst.” Luke 17:21 (TPT) says, “God’s kingdom realm is already expanding **within** some of you.” Philippians 3:20 says, “We are a colony (now) of heaven on earth.”



God’s kingdom is meant to CHANGE the way you think about yourself on the inside and the way you live out your faith in the world around you. And you can take it with you wherever you go because it is *in* you!

In God’s kingdom:

- God loves us like a Father. Jesus is His Son and our Savior, and because of Jesus we can be part of God’s family too (**Family**).
- We love our neighbors and show care and kindness to people who might feel left out or forgotten (**Friends**).
- We share life together around the table in community and in communion with Jesus (**Feasts**).
- We grow from small beginnings into something strong and life-giving, both as individuals and as God’s people (**Fields**).

This was very different from the kingdoms people knew.

The “kingdom of this world” runs on force, fear, fame, and fortune. It did then in Rome, and you still see these distortions of success and POWER today. The “kingdom of

darkness” that can creep into our hearts works through fear, falsehoods, fleshly desires, and fractures. But Colossians 1:13 reminds us: **“He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved Son.”**

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) shows what this kingdom looks like. It’s often called the “Upside-Down Kingdom” because what the world sees as weak and humble and forgiving to a fault, Jesus calls blessed and fruitful. **Instead of ruling from the top down and expecting to be served, Jesus showed the importance of lifting people up.** This was living with real authority as His representatives.

Jesus welcomed CHILDREN. He interacted with and healed the disabled and sick. He let women sit and learn with Him. He touched lepers. He freed people from demonic oppression that was keeping them from even thinking straight. He upended the political structure of importance and broke social norms. He said, “Unless you change and become like children... you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

That was the SURPRISE. Jesus didn’t just come to free people from Roman rule. He wanted to free people from guilt, shame, and sin by truly seeing and loving them as whole people—inside their hearts and souls. **Jesus showed that real power is love and that real greatness is found in serving others. Real freedom starts on the inside, and no empire or outside force can take that away.**

Every week, faithful Jews prayed the Shema: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength... and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus stood before them as the One who loved them first, making it possible for people to truly love God and others.

Some people did not receive Him, but others did. Kingdom citizens and the CHURCH began to grow—not only among Jewish people, but among people from every background around the world. The Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord is offered to anyone who is willing to receive Him and follow Him.

In God’s kingdom, you are not measured by how eloquently you speak or how the world sees you. **You are SEEN and known by God. You belong in His love. You are valuable**

because He made you, knows you, and invites you into His kingdom. Jesus came to open a place for you where your life matters.

Do you choose to let Jesus be Lord of your life? Will you love Him with your whole personhood?

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is another term for “good news”? **Answer:** Gospel

2. What is the study of how living things relate to each other and to their environment?
Answer: Ecology

3. When God is portrayed as a “Father,” what traits do you think He might have? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Loving, caring, kind, provider)

4. What’s the first thought that comes to mind with the term “Upside-Down Kingdom”? What is one example of that from Matthew 5 (The Beatitudes)? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g.)

5. Have you made Jesus Lord of your life? If so, please share about when you did that and why. If not, would you like to make Him your Lord? **Answer:** (Student reflection)

If you have never officially made Jesus the Lord of your life so you may enter into His kingdom, and live eternally with Him, do you want to? Maybe you want to recommit?

Pray this simple prayer with a believing heart:

Jesus, I believe You love me. I believe You died for me and rose again. I am sorry for my sin. I receive Your forgiveness. I choose You as my Lord. Help me follow You.

Amen.

Context Clues

THE JEWISH CLIENT KING

The client kings Rome placed over the Jews were not part of the traditional royal line of Israel's kings. Many of them, including Herod the Great and his sons, were actually not from the ancient Jewish royal family descended from King David. Because of this, some Jewish people did not see them as true rightful kings. Their authority came from Roman political power rather than from family heritage or God's covenant with Israel.

For example, Herod Antipas inherited his position through Roman approval and family connections, not because he was chosen by the Jewish people or came from Israel's traditional royal lineage. This helped Rome keep control of the region, but it also caused tension because many Jews hoped for a true king from David's line to lead them.

History often remembers Herod Antipas as a small but complicated ruler – someone who held power without strong popular support, and whose name is mostly connected to the stories of beheading John the Baptist and absolving himself from accusing Jesus.

Then & Now

In the Roman world, there were no hospitals and no organized care for the poor, sick, or orphaned. If someone was very ill, they depended on family or paid a private doctor. If a baby was unwanted or unhealthy, it was common to leave the child outside to die or be taken into slavery. But Christians believed every person was made in God's image, so human life had value no matter how weak or unwanted someone seemed.

During deadly plagues, believers stayed behind to nurse the sick – even when others fled. As Dionysius of Alexandria wrote, Christians cared for the sick “heedless of danger,” while many others avoided even close friends.

Christians also rescued abandoned infants and raised them as their own. By the fourth century, leaders like Basil of Caesarea organized large centers that cared for the sick, the poor, and orphans – early models of what would become hospitals and orphanages. In a culture that valued power and usefulness, Christians built communities around mercy, showing that in God's kingdom the weak were not disposable but deeply loved.

By the late 1800s, historians estimate that a majority of American hospitals were founded by religious organizations, especially Catholic orders. In some regions, nearly every early hospital had church roots. Churches still stepped into needs that cities and

states were not yet structured to meet. Imagine how many lives were saved by the care of Christians following Christ's kingdom values.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

"Seek first the kingdom of God...." Matthew 6:33a

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch "Matthew 5: The Upside-Down Kingdom" (7:33)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zTIW_aMDPI
- Watch Bible Project's "Gospel" (4:30)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41M013X3A>
- Watch "Intro to Ecology" (4:46)
<https://youtu.be/GlnFylwdYH4?si=yJ2ZBF59mwQSfaqa>
- Listen to the hymn, "This Is My Father's World" (3:52)
https://youtu.be/EMAsxu_HwaA?si=R06dmlvSQ64KINP_
- Read the story behind the hymn "This Is my Father's World"
https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/this-is-my-father-s-world/#google_vignette
- BONUS: Watch John Ortberg's "Who Is This Man: Session 1" (17:32)
https://youtu.be/LeXROyxzUc0?si=K44TD_i_cTRixidX

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of these ways to demonstrate your understanding of the yoke:

1. **Make a 2-Column List, Write a Prayer**
 - Read John 10:10: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

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- On a piece of paper, Communication Partner draws a line down the middle. On one side write “STEAL, KILL, DESTROY” on the other side write “RICH AND SATISFYING LIFE.”
 - Speller, make short statements about your current life situation and sort what fits under each category for you—what’s going not so well, and what’s working. It’s okay if it’s lopsided—just be honest!
 - Knowing what you now know about Jesus wanting to free you from the kingdom of darkness and bring your life under the rule and care of His kingdom of light, write a heartfelt prayer about how you want to present these cares before Him and ask for keys for living a more satisfying, full, free life from the inside out.
 - Keep this list and use it again and again for your prayer requests, and notice what God does!

2. Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics

- Write a poem or song about the kingdom of God, Jesus as Lord, or the ecology of the kingdom (family, friends, feasts, fields),.

3. Make a Kingdom Ecology Map

- Draw a circle in the middle of a page, and write the word “Kingdom Ecology” inside.
- From the circle make four spokes that go out and write the words FAMILY, FRIENDS, FEASTS, FIELDS.
- Choose one of those categories to spell out a list of who or what is already in your kingdom ecology. (Family and friends, might be self-explanatory. For feasts—you might write your favorite meals or restaurants to enjoy with others, for fields—you might list the environments where you are thriving.) If you’re feeling ambitious, fill all of them out. You or your partner can even add stickers, stamps or art to it. Hang it on your wall and remember to thank God for it! .

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

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|-------------|--------------|
| 1. TRUTH | 11. FAMILY |
| 2. SAVE | 12. FRIENDS |
| 3. KINGDOM | 13. FEASTS |
| 4. CENTER | 14. FIELDS |
| 5. PURPOSE | 15. CHANGE |
| 6. HISTORY | 16. CHILDREN |
| 7. GOOD | 17. CHURCH |
| 8. NEWS | 18. SEEN |
| 9. POLITICS | 19. LOVE |
| 10. ECOLOGY | 20. SOULS |

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