

June • July • August 2011



# Encounter Leader Guide

## Using This Guide

The leader helps for each lesson correspond to the lessons in *Encounter* (student book). The format of the leader guide has changed. The new format will help teachers as they lead the class in exploring the scripture passage, understanding what the scripture means in their lives, and identifying what it means to live accordingly. The guide will continue to provide activity suggestions and discussion tips. Use the questions and suggestions to further class discussion and to encourage the group toward action.

## Evaluating

Tell us what you think of this issue by completing and returning the evaluation form at the back of this resource.

**Writers:** Cardelia Howell-Diamond

**Editor:** Cindy H. Martin

Vol. 5, No. 4

June, July, August 2011

Cover photo: © szefei/istockphoto.com

---

ENCOUNTER LEADER GUIDE is published quarterly by the Ministry Council of the General Assembly of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to ENCOUNTER, 8207 Traditional Place, Cordova, TN 38016.

Price \$3.25 per quarter.

The lessons in this quarterly are developed from outlines prepared by the Committee on the Uniform Series, produced for use by the member denominations of Education and Leadership Ministries Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

# A Job Well Done

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore how Joshua's conquest of Canaan was interpreted by the early Jews; (2) to assess your feelings and attitudes about keeping promises; (3) to identify promises God has made to the community of faith and commit to participating on God's behalf in fulfilling those promises in the world today.

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 1:1-6; 11-12 **Scripture Selection:** Joshua 1:1b-6; 11:16-19, 21-23

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Isaiah 63:7. *Hymns:* "Trust and Obey," "Be Still and Know," "'Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus." *Devotional Reading:* Acts 26:1-7.

## Advance Preparation

During the summer months, attendance tends to be sporadic. Regular attendees may be absent more frequently and you may have more visitors than usual. Keep these possibilities in mind as you plan.

Read the entire scripture for the first few lessons to help you get a grasp on the direction the quarter will be heading. Gather some resources to aid in your understanding of the text. There are many commentaries available to you. The author used *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*.

Spend some time with the background scripture as well as the printed text for this lesson. Read the student lesson and make notes or highlight things you may want to discuss in more detail.

If this is your first time to teach this class:

- Spend some time getting to know the members of the class. Doing so will help you to be a more effective leader.

- Locate the room or area where the class meets. Rearrange the seating, if possible. Remove items left from previous quarters; add some fresh flowers or a potted plant.

- Learn about any traditions the class has such as prayer requests at the beginning or end of each class.

Locate a map of the promised land and display it in the area where the class meets.

Prepare a timeline and add to it each week throughout the study of Joshua and Judges.

You will need a copy of the 1984 *Confession of Faith of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* and an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk for one activity. You will need note cards and pencils for another activity.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome the students as they gather for class. Introduce yourself to any students whom you do not know. Make a special point to welcome visitors and integrate them into the class.

Allow time for normal class activities each week, including prayer requests, offering, and announcements. Invite a volunteer to open with prayer.

Call attention to the title of the lesson "A Job Well Done." Encourage class members to comment as to what those words mean to them. Then explain, "Moses led God's people for forty years—a job well done. But now that Moses is dead, it is time for a new leader. Today we will meet Joshua, the person God appointed to lead the people into the Promised Land. Call attention to the map of the Promised Land. Remind class members that the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness, not because it was such a long journey, but learning to trust God.

## Exploring the Scripture

The Book of Joshua begins with the Israelites still in the wilderness, ready to enter the Promised Land. They look much like the people who first entered the wilderness after leaving Egypt, but some-

thing has changed. The scripture paints a picture of a group of people willing and ready to follow God's leading, very different from the group who made the golden calf.

The focus of this book is on Joshua's leadership and God's direct involvement in the history of the Israelites. Their journey into the Promised Land will not be peaceful or easy. Rather it results in what is often called Holy War. The student book does not address this issue, but be prepared for someone in the class to raise questions about the idea and concept of war given in the scripture.

The Book of Joshua tells the spiritual as well as physical history of the Israelites. As God's people shared their stories with younger generations, they included accounts of the battles as reminders that God was with them, even in the midst of trial and tribulation. This book was written with the benefit of hindsight. Looking back one can often see God's hand present even in the worst of situations.

Suggest class members think of a difficult situation they experienced through which they later saw God's presence. Then ask: How did realizing that God was at work in and through the situation change your attitude? How does remembering this time strengthen your faith? the faith of others? Who are the "spiritual giants" who have helped you to grow in your faith?

### **Digging Deeper**

Ask a volunteer to read the section entitled "Follow Through" on page 5 of the student book. Then ask class members: Are there times when we say we will follow God's plan but refuse to step forward? What would the church look like if it followed through in its words of trust in God? What would individuals' lives look like if they did the same?

Call attention to the section entitled "God Keeps Promises" on page 6 of the student book. For some students this concept will be a foundation of their faith, for others it might be new. Refer to the *Confession of Faith*, section 3.03. Ask for volunteers to look up the scripture references listed for that section and read them aloud making notes of key words or phrases on an erasable board or newsprint. Ask the class how they feel about being included in God's covenant of grace. Encourage them to think of others who could benefit from hearing about God's grace.

### **Living the Faith**

Remind the students that while Joshua was not perfect, people still consider him to have been a pillar of the faith. He faithfully sought God's will. Distribute index cards and pencils to class members. Read aloud the question at the end of "Follow Through" on page 5 in the student book. Encourage each person to write his or her response on the card. Reassure students that you will not ask them to share their thoughts.

Invite class members to join you in a time of led silent prayer. Begin the prayer by thanking God for those people, like Joshua, who followed God faithfully. Pause and allow students an opportunity to add their own thanks for such people in their lives. Continue in this manner, including prompts for the need of trust, and the will to follow through. Also include a time to thank God for the gift of grace we have been given and a time to reflect on those who need to hear about and accept God's grace.

### **Closing**

The next lesson focuses on following God's rules. Encourage class members to think of a time when following the rules was difficult for them or someone they know.

Remind the class of any upcoming events or important dates. Encourage them to invite others to participate in the class. Ask a volunteer to contact class members who were absent. It is important to let people know they were missed.

Close by singing a verse of one of the suggested hymns.

# Living by the Rules

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review God's words to Joshua about being strong and courageous and to explore what they meant to him; (2) to examine what commandments God expects us to obey; (3) to identify ways that God commissions us as leaders today.

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 1 **Scripture Selection:** Joshua 1:7-16

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 97:11-12. *Hymns:* "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee," "Love Divine," "Take my Life and Let It Be." *Devotional Reading:* Deuteronomy 5:22-33.

## Advanced Preparation

Begin your preparation this week by reading Joshua 1. Read it from more than one translation, perhaps including *The Message*, the CEV, and the NIV. Using different versions can provide new insight into the text.

Read the student lesson thoroughly, looking especially for any items that might be difficult for individual class members. Highlight items of note or that you feel need more discussion.

Think about the members of your class. Is there anyone who might especially benefit from the lesson? Call or send them a note to invite them to the class this week. Pray for the members of your class by name, asking God to reveal God's will to each of them.

Write rules of various kinds on paper or poster board and display throughout the room. These rules might include things such as one or more of the Ten Commandments, traffic laws, rules for the benefit of community life (leash laws, trespassing, etc.), and so forth.

You will need an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk for an activity.

Using an Internet search engine (such as Google) locate copies of some inaugural speeches. Provide copies for members of the class.

## Welcome/Introduction

Greet each member of the class as he or she arrives. Make them feel welcome. Introduce yourself to any newcomers. As class members gather, spend some time catching up with one another, sharing joys and concerns as a group. Ask for a volunteer to open the class with prayer.

Call attention to the rules posted throughout the learning area. Remind students that you asked them to think about their experience with following the rules. Then pose the following questions: What do you think of when you hear the word *rule*? Is it a positive word or a negative word? Are you a "rule follower" or a "rules are made to be broken" kind of person? Remind the class that God's rule for our life is not as simple as a list of dos or don'ts.

## Exploring the Scripture

The Israelites entered Canaan with a new spirit. They were ready to follow God, and they did so even when it was difficult and the situation tested their faith. Everything in the Book of Joshua points again and again to the fact that God is in control. Joshua was the new leader of Israel, stepping into the big shoes of Moses. Moses had led the Israelites for forty years. Despite their struggles in the wilderness, the people of Israel had no doubt loved and respected Moses.

God has appointed Joshua to be the new leader of the Israelites, telling him to be strong and courageous. How do you think Joshua felt? What might have been some of his concerns? Why would strength and courage be so important for Joshua? Why are those characteristics important for leaders today?

The lesson points out that the people accepted Joshua. They promised to follow his leadership.

Why do you think they accepted him so readily? Why was this acceptance so important? What happens when a group does not unite behind the leader? If the people had not been united behind Joshua, what would have been the likely outcome of their entrance into the Promised Land?

### **Digging Deeper**

The selected scripture is part of what could be considered Joshua's inauguration speech. In it he laid out the plans God had revealed to him for the nation and tribes of Israel.

Invite students to think about inaugural speeches you have heard in the past. Have any moved you or the nation to respond to them in a manner similar to the Israelites?

Distribute copies of the inaugural speeches you located. Allow time for class members to skim through them. Then ask: What differences/similarities do you note between these leaders and Joshua? In what ways did the modern-day speeches seek God's will?

**Note:** Think about the individuals in your class. If discussing these speeches would become too heated or too far off topic, do not use this activity. The point is not to debate the abilities of leaders, but to call attention to the words of a new leader.

Have a volunteer read "Calming the Fears" on page 9 of the student book. Suggest class members turn to one or two other people and share a time when they were afraid. Ask them to consider what, if anything, could have calmed their fears.

Joshua reminded the people that while they were going into the unknown God was with them, guiding them. The twelve tribes united behind the leader God had chosen for them.

Ask the class to think about what the church would look like if all members united behind God's chosen leaders. What would be the same? What would change? How difficult would it be for modern-day persons to trust in the same way the Israelites did?

### **Living the Faith**

Summarize or ask for volunteers to read aloud "The Greatest Commandment" on page 10 in the student book. Ask the group to think about what rules actually govern their lives. Using the erasable board or newsprint, suggest the students list things that would change if everyone lived by the rule of love. Why is this rule especially important for leaders?

Encourage the class to examine how well they carry out the rule of love. Identify people who need to receive love: single parents who may be at an emotional or financial breaking point, widow(er)s who are depressed and lonely, those who are outcasts, the foreigner in your midst (culturally different, just relocated, college students living away from home, etc.), those who struggle to read, and so forth. How can your class show love to these people? Plan to put some of your idea into practice in the near future.

Challenge students to think about the rule of love as they go into their everyday lives this week. Suggest they make a list of ways that they lived within the law of love as well as some areas where they need to improve. Encourage them to use this list for personal reflection.

### **Closing**

Read or sing together a verse from one of the suggested hymns as a way of uniting your voices to God.

Lead the class in prayer for the leaders within your congregation—both "official" and "unofficial." Ask people to lift up their names within the group. Pray also for their families as they support and live with them.

The next lesson will focus on Rahab and the two spies. Invite the group to think of people God has unexpectedly used for good in their lives.

# Knowing Whom to Trust

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine the relationship between Rahab and the two spies whom Joshua sent out; (2) to appreciate what it feels like to experience protection; (3) to identify experiences of protection you have had and to express praise to God for them.

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 2 **Selected Scripture:** Joshua 2:3-9, 15-16, 22-24

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 9:1-2. *Hymns:* “God will Take Care of You,” “You are My All in All,” “Glorify Thy Name,” “They’ll Know We are Christians.” *Devotional Reading:* James 2:18-25.

## Advanced Preparation

Read the story of Rahab in Joshua 2 this week. Pray that God will give you fresh eyes to see this story in a new light. Also pray that the members of your class will come with an open heart and enter into positive, productive discussion about Rahab and her role in the saving of God’s people.

This Sunday is Father’s Day in America. Be aware of people in your class for whom this day may be difficult.

If possible, secure a recording of the Randy Travis song “Three Wooden Crosses” to play for the class. You will also need the equipment with which to play the recording.

You will need the lyrics to “They’ll Know We are Christians.” This song is covered by copyright, so you are not free to make photocopies.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome everyone to class warmly. Take a few moments to touch base about your lives and to do the routine activities of your class (take up offering, attendance, etc.). Open the class with prayer, being sure to include any prayer requests that have been made.

Invite students to tell about an unlikely person God used in their lives. Ask: Why was that person unlikely? Explain that Rahab was a prostitute, yet God used her in a mighty way. In fact, Rahab was likely the great-great-grandmother of King David.

## Exploring the Scripture

According to scholars, Jericho is the oldest city in the world, dating to about 9250 B.C. It was a true desert oasis, having been watered by a nearby spring that issues 30,000 cubic feet of water daily. It is also below sea level, which gives it a very temperate climate. It’s easy to see why the first spies said this land, “flows with milk and honey.” (See Numbers 13:25 ff.) The lushness of this city would have been very appealing after having wandered in the wilderness for so many years.

Archeological evidence suggests that Jericho was built with two walls surrounding the city. The interior wall was a few bricks thick and the houses attached to this wall had a fair amount of protection. However there was another wall outside of this one, which was only one brick thick. Scholars speculate that Rahab’s house was built against this less-secure wall. As a prostitute, she would not have been accepted in “polite society.” Many scholars speculate that the outer wall fell, leaving a pile of rubble that attackers could easily have scaled, thereby allowing them to breach the other wall. Visit [Bible-architecture.info](http://Bible-architecture.info) for pictures and explanations of the walls of Jericho.

Jericho was likely small enough that strangers would have been easily noticed. Visitors were likely infrequent since Jericho was not close to any other major settlements. Yet, the stories of the Israelites’ conquests had reached the people of Jericho, causing great fear.

The Bible doesn't tell us why the spies chose to visit the house of Rahab. While we can speculate, doing so does not help us to understand the scripture. We do know that God used Rahab to protect the spies and that in return they promised to see that she and her family were protected.

### **Digging Deeper**

Summarize the information about Rahab from "A Prostitute-like Faith?" on pages 14-15 in the student book. Rahab was an impressive person. The New Testament writers seemed to hold her up as a model for faith (James 2:25, Hebrews 11:31). She could have easily followed the crowd, turned in the spies, and been rewarded by her neighbors and the political leaders. How tempting it must have been for her to do what society would have deemed as the "right thing." Instead she voiced her faith in the God of Israel and agreed to help the two strangers. She asked only for mercy for her family.

Invite class members to tell about a time when they experienced protection. Then ask: How did it feel to know that you were protected? What might have been the outcome of the situation if such protection had not been available to you? Lead the class in a brief prayer of praise and thanksgiving for God's protection.

Rahab was an outcast among her own people. She knew that they would not offer her any protection. Ask class members: What groups of people are on the outskirts of society today? How do you react to them? What types of protection do they need? What changes are needed in order to ensure that such protection is available to them? How willing are we to make those changes?

If you were able to locate the recording of "Three Wooden Crosses" play it now. Encourage class members to share reflections about the message of this song.

### **Living the Faith**

The section entitled "Be a good Steward" (student book, page 16) invites class members to consider how they can use wisely the opportunities God places before them. Ask students: What opportunities has God given you recently? How did you respond? How can you be a better steward of such opportunities in the future?

Challenge the group to come up with a way of serving others. Perhaps they could stand at a busy intersection and give away bottles of cold water or juice to motorists with the simple message, "God wants to refresh your life today." Perhaps you could begin a "noisy offering" during worship, collecting change in metal buckets. Designate the money for outreach. The noise is a reminder that the needs of others are always calling to us. Be creative, but keep it simple; follow through is key.

Read together the "For Discussion and Action" statements on page 17 in the student book. Encourage class members to respond to these questions. Identify areas where your congregation needs to improve. Make plans for how you will address those areas.

### **Closing**

Present the words of "They'll Know We are Christians" to the class. If you are able, lead the group in singing this song. If not, invite them to read the words together as a way of expressing their commitment to live in ways that show God's love and mercy to the world.

The next lesson is on the fall of Jericho. Invite class members to think about a special accomplishment in their lives to share next week. Invite them to bring a memento of that accomplishment to class.



# The Thrill of Victory

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To look into the story of Jericho to see how and why victory was obtained; (2) to learn what the Bible teaches about war and violence of any nature; (3) to commit to marching around “the walls of Jericho” in our society in an effort to destroy or dismantle those walls.

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 5:13–6:27 **Scripture Selection:** Joshua 6:2-3, 4b, 12-20b

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Genesis 33:4. *Hymns:* “The Solid Rock,” “As the Deer,” “Spirit of the Living God.” *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 98:1-6.

## Advanced Preparation

This week we will continue to study the battle with Jericho from the Book of Joshua. Take time to read the account from 5:13–6:27 so that you may have the full scope of the story.

Read the lesson from the student book and take time to reflect on the concept of “holy war.” The lesson will address this topic. Be aware of people who might find this topic difficult to discuss. Those who have fought in battle or lost a loved one in war might have a hard time with this lesson. Be sensitive to their feelings and needs.

Locate magazine or newspaper photos of buildings that have been demolished either intentionally or due to a natural disaster. Display these photos throughout the learning area.

Prepare your story about an accomplishment. Contact class members to remind them about their assignment. Set up a table on which class members may place their mementos.

Gather materials as needed.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome the members of your class as they arrive. Introduce yourself to any newcomers. Pair visitors with regular members of the class to help the visitors feel included. Take time for routine matters such as offering and attendance. Ask for a volunteer to open in prayer, remembering any prayer requests that have been shared.

Remind the students that you asked them to be prepared to share about an accomplishment. Allow a few moments for individuals to share. Invite class members to put their mementos on the table so that others may view them after class.

Call attention to the photos displayed. Explain that this lesson deals with a miraculous accomplishment. However, God, not man, brought about this accomplishment.

## Exploring the Scripture

The Book of Joshua tells the story of the Israelites’ move into the Promised Land. Since the land was occupied, the Israelites had to fight to reclaim the land that God had given to Abraham so many years before. Joshua mentions many of these battles, but provides very little information about them.

However, information about the battle of Jericho is given in great detail. Why? Many people have wondered why the writers of Joshua would have seen this battle to be so important. After all it does not hold Joshua up as a great strategist. It does not sing of Joshua’s strength. Rather it speaks to the strength of the Lord and the willingness of Joshua and the people to obey.

War was, and is, a messy business. War in biblical times was what we would call barbaric. The depiction of war found on the pages of the Bible often offend our westernized senses. But no matter how offended we might be, they are there and there must be something we can learn from them. The battle of Jericho is about literally putting the fear of God into a people. This combination of psycho-

logical and physical warfare is unparalleled at this point in scripture. The point of this method of war was clear: to make sure that everyone, participants and those who would hear the tale, would know the strength and the power of the God of Israel.

### **Digging Deeper**

Take some time in your group to discuss the idea of holy war found in the Bible. Read aloud the questions posed at the end of the “More than a Gospel Song” on pages 19-20 in the student book. Be mindful that class members will have different views. Make it clear that everyone is expected to be respectful of differing ideas.

Segue into the idea that the walls of Jericho had to come down so that the people of Israel could gain control of the Promised Land. While genocide is not something we should in any way adopt today, we can use this idea in a spiritual principle. Invite class members to consider: What walls have been put up that keep us chained to wrong ways of living, thinking, acting? Summarize or ask a couple of volunteers to read aloud “Walls of Separation” on page 21 in the student book. Then ask: What walls need to be destroyed so that the evil and hate of these things can be vanquished? Challenge students to answer (privately) the personal reflection questions at the end of this section.

Make a point to say that only through the power of God can we accomplish these things. It is not about what we can do on our own, but what God can do with and through us.

### **Living the Faith**

Have a volunteer read aloud the last four paragraphs of “God’s Faithful Acts” on page 22 of the student book. Then ask students: What do you think of the idea that the fall of Jericho is a resurrection story? What would the world look like if we treated all death, loss, and grief as an opportunity for resurrection, renewal, and rebirth? Identify ways you could model this thinking for your congregation and/or community.

We as the church are called to live united as one body, yet we are often separate from one another. Denominational differences are not the only things that separate us, although that can certainly be the case, but we are also separate from one another within our own congregations. We value some gifts, usually the more public gifts, more than those quiet gifts others have been given. In some instances there is a social hierarchy within congregations based on family ties or purse strings. None of these is biblical in basis. None of these build up the community of faith. Spend time with your class thinking about what walls need to be torn down in your fellowship. Perhaps feelings have been hurt and reconciliation needs to occur. Covenant to pray together and individually for God to remove the walls between God’s people that they may be one in spirit with Christ Jesus.

### **Closing**

Invite class members to join together in singing one of the hymns suggested for use with this lesson.

Lead the class in reading Psalm 98:1-6 in unison. Make sure you are reading from the same translation.

Invite students to stand and join in a sentence prayer together. A sentence prayer is one where each person says one sentence in turn. Begin by praying for unity and God’s blessing upon his people.

If your class does not regularly get together outside of church, plan a fellowship outing. It will strengthen the bonds of those who attend the class and is a great non-threatening opportunity to invite others to join you.

# The Agony of Defeat

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To explore how sin and punishment are seen in the story of Achan; (2) to uncover your feelings about punishment for wrongdoing and your thoughts about whether violence is the way God reacts; (3) to look corporately or privately at actions you deem as disobedience to God.

**Background Scripture:** Joshua 7:1–8:29 **Scripture Selection:** Joshua 7:1, 10-12, 22-26

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Proverbs 12:12-13. *Hymns:* “What Wondrous Love Is This?” “At Calvary,” “Jesus Calls Us,” “Amazing Grace.” *Devotional Reading:* Romans 6:1-11.

## Advanced Preparation

While preparing for this lesson, read not only the selected passage but the Background Scripture. The background passage includes several things that are not a part of the scripture printed in the student book.

Pray for each student individually and the class as a whole. Ask God to illuminate your studies and bring the scripture into your life.

Look up the words *consequences* and *cleanse* in a dictionary. Write the definitions on an index card or slip of paper for reference during class.

Secure a copy of the 1984 *Confession of Faith* and an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk. You will also need index cards and pencils.

If possible, locate the music for or a recorded performance of “What Wondrous Love Is This?”

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome each student individually to class. Allow some time for the members of class to reconnect with one another. Take attendance, collect offering, and make announcements as needed. Invite a volunteer to open the class with prayer, being sure to include any prayer requests that have been made. Ask for a volunteer to touch base with class members who are absent.

Take time to talk about projects or ideas started in previous class sessions. What things are you working on to be of service and to break down walls? Make sure that everyone who wishes to do so is involved. Depending on the size of your class, you may want to invite others in the congregation to join with you in any projects you undertake.

Encourage class members to share their understanding of the word *consequences*. Ask: What do you think of when you hear this word? Is it synonymous with punishment? Then share the definition you found in a dictionary.

Explain that in this lesson they will be exploring the consequences of wrong behavior and how those consequences can affect more than the one responsible.

## Exploring the Scripture

This lesson can be a hard one for us to hear. Our needs for fairness make God’s reaction to Israel’s sin seem extreme and too harsh. God had told the nation of Israel to destroy all things associated with Jericho and to take the things of value to the temple treasury. Joshua passed on these orders and the people agreed.

When Joshua began to make plans to attack Ai, we notice a change in his method. First of all he did not go to God for advice, but trusted his spies’ assessment of the situation. He was beginning to rely upon the strength of the people, not the strength of God. Consequently, the Israelite army was defeated and several of Joshua’s soldiers were killed. In frustration and anger Joshua turned to God and cried, “Why have you done this to us?” He blamed God.

God, however, was having none of it. God told Joshua that the people of Israel had sinned and they should pay for those sins. Through a long and involved process God revealed the name of the person who had broken the promise. Achan confessed; he and his family, cattle, and all that he owned were taken before the people of Israel and put to death.

We must remember that our ideas of individuality are not the same as biblical ideas of personhood. Achan was the head of his household. If he did well, his household did well. If he failed, his household suffered. Achan had kept some of the “spoils of war” for his personal use, thus breaking the people of Israel’s promise to God. In order to remove the sin from the nation, it was decided that he and all he possessed should be destroyed.

### **Digging Deeper**

Joshua began this passage of scripture in an open and frank conversation with God. Joshua was displeased by his recent failure and wondered where God was in this whole business. If we are honest with ourselves, we can relate to his feelings. Things had been going well, so he had let his dependence on God become a bit lax. When things started to fall apart, Joshua hit his knees asking where God had gone. We have also walked away from God and then asked why God wasn’t there when we needed him. In essence we have blamed God for our sins and short comings.

Have the class take a closer look at “Cleansing of God’s people” on pages 25-26 of the student book. Use the questions at the end of the section to engage the class in a discussion. There is little doubt that at least some of the members of the class will take issue with the seeming unfairness of this biblical account.

Summarize the information presented in “The Fear of God” on page 26 in the student book. In addition to the questions posed at the end of the section, ask students to think about times when they have had to suffer the consequences of being disobedient. If any students are comfortable doing so, give them an opportunity to share the form those consequences took (loss of job, bad grade, estrangement from a loved one, etc.).

### **Living the Faith**

Have the class think about how their lives might be different if the consequences of sin were still enforced in a corporate manner. Then ask: How much more important would grace and mercy seem? In what ways was the death of Achan an act of mercy?

Have class members define the word *cleanse*. Accept all answers and have someone write them on an erasable board or newsprint. Then have a volunteer read the second paragraph on page 27 in the student book, which begins, “In order for us to be reconciled...”

Read together or invite someone to read aloud section 4.22 of the *Confession of Faith*. Explain *sanctification* using the definition in the student book (page 27). Discuss the importance of sanctification to believers. Challenge the class to continued sanctification by the Holy Spirit through study and prayer.

### **Closing**

Read the final paragraph of the lesson aloud. Hand out index cards and pencils; read aloud the questions in the student book (page 27). Give everyone time to answer. Let the students know that their responses are for their own personal reflection.

Join together to sing or listen to a recording of “What Wondrous Love Is This?”

Read Romans 6:1-11 responsively. (Make sure to use the same translation.) Close the class in prayer, leaving some moments for silent reflection.

# Help is on the way

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review the story of the judges whom God raised up to help the Israelites; (2) to appreciate the impact of our obedience and disobedience on our relationship with God; (3) to depend on God through good times and bad times.

**Background Scripture:** Judges 2; 21:25 **Scripture Selection:** Judges 2:11-19

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening sentences:* Hebrews 10:22. *Hymns:* “Amazing Grace,” “Rock of Ages,” “O How He Loves You and Me.” *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 78:1-8.

## Advanced Preparation

This lesson is the first of five on the Book of Judges. One or more commentaries would be helpful as you familiarize yourself with this book and its history. The author used *New Interpreter's Bible* and *Interpretation: Judges*.

Read the Background Scripture as you prepare to teach this lesson. You might find it helpful to read the scripture in more than one version.

Read the student book lesson carefully. Take notes or highlight areas about which you have questions or identify those things you want to look at more closely with the class.

If you began a timeline at the beginning of the quarter, add the names of the biblical judges to it. If you did not create a timeline, list judges' names and the order in which they served on a piece of posterboard. Leave the posterboard in the class area for the next five lessons.

Locate a gavel and/or other items a modern-day judge might use. Display them in the class area.

You will need an envelope, pen, and at least one piece of stationery for every person in class.

At the top of a sheet of paper or newsprint write: “We covenant to follow these words of scripture.” Write Psalm 78:1-8 below the covenant statement. Leave space for everyone to sign their names.

Gather materials before class.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome everyone to class and thank them for their presence. Once class members have arrived and are seated, start class by striking the gavel against a hard surface. Say something such as, “This class is now in session. The Honorable Judge (your name) presiding.”

Encourage students to share what comes to mind when they hear the word *judge*. Accept all answers. Then call their attention to the items a modern-day judge might use.

Explain that the next five lessons will focus on the judges of the Old Testament, primarily after the death of Joshua until the reign of David. Those judges were closer to our idea of freedom fighters than legal magistrates.

Invite class members to share what they think of when they hear the word *grace*. Accept all answers. Tell them that God used the judges in the Bible to bestow grace upon the Israelites.

## Exploring the Scripture

Judges is a fascinating book of the Bible. It comes after the great stories of Joshua. The people of Israel usually managed to be fairly faithful to God when they had a strong leader who kept them in line and set the example for them. With Joshua as their leader, the people had faithfully tried to follow his godly leadership, but had eventually fallen short.

After Joshua's death, each tribe attempted to settle its respective area, but the tribes failed to push out the people of the land and so were once again surrounded by the influence of pagan persons. But

life was good, so they gradually fell away from God and began worshiping the gods of their pagan neighbors. Ask students: Why is it easy for people to wander away from God when life is easy? How do you think God feels about those times when we think we can handle life on our own?

This book is not about heroes, and if you read it looking for heroes you will be disappointed. Instead it is filled with flawed men and one woman whom God called to be military leaders against nations that were huge powerhouses. The methods they used were underhanded at best. Each judge was obviously human, in every regard.

After the death of each judge, the people of Israel returned to their sinful ways, at times even worse than before. During these times they would suffer oppression and persecution at the hands of their enemies. Time and again they called out to God for deliverance and time and again God raised up a judge to rescue them. Finally they did not cry out, and yet God again offered another chance. The only hero you will find in this story is God, whose love never fails, whose grace always reaches out.

### **Digging Deeper**

The Israelites had moved away from God. They did not know the stories of God; they did not know the blessings of God. God's name had ceased to be on their lips. Yet God still remembered them. Amazing, isn't it? They had acted terribly and God still sought relationship with them.

Summarize the section "An Angry Father" on pages 30-31 of the student book. We have talked before about fear of God, but this section brings up the idea of an angry God. Ask students: What does an angry God look like to you? Continue the discussion by asking the questions at the end of the section.

God was upset with the people of Israel because they had violated the covenant they had made with God. They did not live up to their part of the bargain. The people called out for forgiveness, for pardon, and God heard their cries. Ask students to consider: When have you disobeyed God? When you realized that you had been disobedient, how did you react? How did your disobedience change your relationship with God? What was necessary for the restoration of your relationship with God? How does it make you feel to know that God hears your cries and responds?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud "Grace Abounds" on page 33 of the student book. Use the questions at the end as you discuss the section. Pay particular attention to the last question.

### **Living the Faith**

If we are to show that we have accepted God's grace and love, then we need to extend grace and love to others. Doing so is not as easy as one might think. One way to show God's grace is to try to help others find and experience the freedom we have found through God's grace.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are key points in extending grace and mercy to others. Make available the stationery, pens, and envelopes. Encourage each class member to compose a letter to someone (alive or dead) with whom they need to reconcile. Invite class members to write down any offenses perpetrated against themselves and offer forgiveness, or they may ask the other person to forgive wrongs they have committed. Suggest they choose later if they want to mail the letter. Reassure the students that these letters are personal and they can choose what to do with them.

### **Closing**

Pull out the piece of paper with Psalm 78:1-8 written on it. Read it aloud to the group. Invite each person to sign the paper as a promise to never again let a generation grow up not knowing God.

Sing together "Amazing Grace." Close with prayer, including any needs that have been voiced by the class.

# Help from Unexpected Sources

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review the story of Ehud's saving the Israelites from King Eglon of Moab; (2) to recognize that our pleas for help may be answered by those who act in God's name; (3) to ask for help where and when we need it.

**Background Scripture:** Judges 3:7-31; 21:25 **Scripture Selection:** Judges 3:15-25, 29-30

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 121. *Hymns:* "In the Secret," "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." *Devotional Reading:* Psalm 27:7-14.

## Advanced Preparation

Begin your preparation this week in prayer—for the individual members in your class; for yourself; for your congregation.

Read the entire Scripture Selection and the lesson in the student book.

List the names of some famous people who were/are left-handed on a piece of poster board. (Do not put a heading on this list.) A few names to include are Babe Ruth, Marilyn Monroe, Barak Obama, Leonardo da Vinci, Julius Caesar, Ludwig Van Beethoven, Winston Churchill, and Albert Einstein. For the names of additional people, visit <http://www.left-at-the-start.com/famous.html>. Display the list in the class area.

You will need an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk and index cards.

## Welcome/Introduction

Arrive before class members and spend a few moments in prayer for today's session.

Greet class members by offering your left hand. While it will be awkward, it will raise some questions that will help you introduce the lesson.

Allow time for routine things such as taking attendance, making announcements, and so forth before class begins. Note those who are absent and ask a volunteer to contact them. Have someone give an update about any projects in which the class is involved. Encourage class members to share their joys and concerns with one another. Open with prayer, including those joys and concerns that were shared as well as others of which you are aware.

Call attention to the list of names. Invite speculation as to what these people have in common. Give the clue that it has to do with the way you greeted them. Then explain that these people were all left-handed. The judge in this lesson was left-handed, which played a significant role in this story.

## Exploring the Scripture

The Moabites, with the help of their allies the Ammonites and the Amalekites, were oppressing the people of Israel. These nomadic tribes lived to the east and southeast of Jericho. They had a history of raiding other groups and were touted for their military skill. They attacked the Israelites in Canaan and subdued them for eighteen years.

The scripture tells us that the Israelites cried out to God. In this case it does not seem that they were crying out in repentance, but rather in anger towards their oppressors. God heard their groaning and acted to relieve their suffering.

God "raised up" a judge named Ehud. He was a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin. Left-handedness was not valued in the ancient world, yet God chose a left-handed man as judge. God does not value as we value. We learn later in Judges (20:16) that many Benjamites were left-handed, leading scholars to propose that some were perhaps caused to be left-handed so that they might have an advantage in battle.

This scripture passage is rich in humor, but it is often difficult for us to see that humor. Take time to read aloud or summarize the sections “A Difficult Story,” “What’s in a Name,” and “The Plot Thickens” (pages 35-37 in the student book) to help the class understand this humor. This passage can read like a political cartoon, enemies exaggerated in order to get a better laugh. This story would have been entertaining to the Israelites because it made their enemies look like buffoons.

### **Digging Deeper**

While there is a lot of satire and humor in this scripture, there are also many “God-instances”—times when God is active behind the scenes. When we look back on our lives we can often see where God was moving things, using people, to accomplish God’s will.

Encourage a few class members to share about a time when they can now see that God was at work behind the scenes. Ask students: How did you feel in the midst of that situation? As you look back, how do you feel now knowing that God was hearing and answering your pleas for help? How has God used you to answer someone else’s plea for help? What caused you to know that you were acting in God’s will in that situation?

Consider together how easy or difficult it is to ask for and accept help. We pray, asking God for help, but may fail to accept the help sent in the form of another person. Challenge class members to look for ways God is working in their lives right now. Who is God using in your life?

Divide the class into small groups and invite students to share one or more ways where they think God is currently working in their lives. When you come back together as a group, encourage class members to continue looking daily for God’s acts in their lives and in the lives of those around them.

### **Living the Faith**

While we have acknowledged that God is present and active in our lives, we must also acknowledge that God is present and active in the lives of others, even those whom we perceive as our enemies. The author of Judges did not have a respectful view of his enemy. In times of war we often dehumanize our opponents to make harming them more palatable. However, as Christians we are called to love our enemies.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the third and fourth paragraphs of “Where Do We Go Now?” on page 39 in the student book. On the erasable board or newsprint list groups of persons who have been stereotyped. Some examples might be: the elderly, teenagers, racial groups, the rich, etc.

Have two volunteers each read one section quoted from the *Confession of Faith* 6.30 and 6.31, which is printed on page 39 of the student book. Ask the group to look at their list of stereotyped people. Then ask: How can we welcome these people into the community of Christ? What can we do to individually and as a class to oppose, resist, and challenge their oppression? List the responses on the board or newsprint. Give students index cards and suggest they write down at least one item. Encourage class members to take the card home with them and pray daily for God to show the community of faith ways to reach these persons with the love of Christ.

### **Closing**

In closing sing or read together one of the songs listed in the worship suggestions. Invite class members to join you in prayer. You may want to use the following prayer or one of your own. God of mercy and grace, we thank you for your presence here with us today. Make us aware of your constant presence with us. Help us to see your image in all people and help us to serve others and know that by serving them we are serving you. Help us also to be aware of your answers to our prayers through others. Amen.



# Following Wise Leaders

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To review Gideon's attempts to follow God and the mistakes and successes that resulted; (2) to contemplate problems that arise when we do not follow God's rule; (3) to examine whose rule we are following and adjust our practice in order to follow God.

**Background Scripture:** Judges 6–8; 21:25 **Scripture Selection:** Judges 7:2-4, 13-15; 8:22-25

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 46:10. *Hymns:* "Disciples of all Nations," "All Things Bright and Beautiful," "Trust and Obey." *Devotional Reading:* 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

## Advanced Preparation

Early in the week read the Background Scripture listed above. After a couple of days, go back and read those portions that are included in the Scripture Selection.

Read this lesson as well as the one in the student book. Refresh your memory about the story of Gideon. There is much more to his story than what you may have learned as a child.

Pray for each class member by name. Pray for any specific needs of which you are aware, but pray also for any needs of which you are unaware. Ask that God's presence be revealed to them this week.

You will need an erasable board or newsprint and chalk or markers.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome each member of the class individually as she or he arrives. Spend some time checking in with everyone. Invite them to share how praying for the stereotyped persons affected them. (See previous lesson in this guide.) Allow some time for sharing. Open class with prayer.

Tell class members that this lesson is about the Old Testament judge Gideon. Have them tell something they know about Gideon, or what they knew before having read this lesson. Ask a volunteer to record their responses on the erasable board or newsprint. Keep these responses where they will be visible throughout the lesson. Plan to share information from "Exploring the Scripture" with the class.

## Exploring the Scripture

We again find the people of Israel being terrorized by their neighbors—the Midianites and Amalekites. These desert nomads frequently and repeatedly raided the areas occupied by the Israelites, destroying crops and taking anything else of value they could find. The Midianites and Amalekites had a secret weapon—the camel—which allowed them to escape so quickly that the Israelites could not catch them.

In the midst of this situation we find Gideon. He was hiding in the bottom of his winepress, threshing what grain he had been able to harvest or salvage from the crops before the raiders struck. Gideon was not a perfect man. He was not a particularly willing volunteer when God called him to deliver Israel from Midian. Gideon was the youngest in his family, which was part of the tribe of Manasseh—the weakest of the tribes. Gideon obviously wondered why God would call him; therefore, he wanted proof that this stranger who had appeared to him was indeed God. Ask class members to reflect silently: When have you offered excuses rather than follow God's will?

Having been heavily influenced by his pagan neighbors, Gideon asked God to perform signs and wonders so that he might believe. This idea of testing God has its roots in the pagan practices of the day. The Israelites were to accept God's word because it was God's word. However, if you do not know God, then the language you speak will not be Christian. Gideon *knew of* God but did not *know* God. God took Gideon where he was, as he was, and moved him where God needed him to be. Ask

class members: When has God put you where God needed you to be? At what point did you realize why you were in that situation?

After Gideon was finally convinced of God's will, he led the Israelite troops to victory. However, as is pointed out in the student book, he claimed some of the glory for himself. He then began the slippery slope of seeing himself as the victor as opposed to giving the credit to God.

### **Digging Deeper**

Gideon had a little bit of a rocky start, but once he was convinced of God's will, he led the Israelites to victory over their enemies. However, Gideon's pride began to get in the way. Review the story of Gideon with the class. Invite class members to add to the list they began earlier.

Summarize "A Promising Beginning" on page 42-43 in the student book. Then ask: How would you have felt if God had reduced your army of thirty-two thousand to just three hundred? How easy would it have been for you to trust in God's assurance of victory?

Invite one or two volunteers to read aloud "Words of Assurance" on page 43 of the student book. Despite having received an assurance of victory from God's angel, Gideon wanted the confirmation of a person. We might be tempted to say that it's only natural to question whether or not we truly saw and heard a messenger from God, to want confirmation from a familiar source. Use the questions at the end of that section for class discussion.

Things were going well for Gideon until he began to let his pride interfere. God wanted the people of Israel to know that God was in charge and had delivered them from their enemies. Ask class members: When have you failed to give God credit for something? What was the result? How did the experience change you? change your relationship with God?

### **Living the Faith**

Again and again in the Book of Judges God called the people of Israel into relationship. Again and again they rebelled against God's leadership. Ask class members: What does it mean to rebel against God's will? What things do we do that may seem good, but are not? How do you evaluate things before you become involved in them? If any students have examples of such situations, allow them to share.

As a class read the example (page 45 of the student book) beginning with the paragraph that starts "Recently I heard about..." Invite the class to respond to this situation by asking: Which side would you take? Why?

Challenge class members to identify situations in your community where they can offer the love of Christ to others. Make plans as to how you will offer the love of Christ to these people. Remember that a person's need for the love of Christ has nothing to do with culture, race, or economic status. How will you make sure that you are following God's leading as you make these plans?

### **Closing**

As you prepare to draw the class to a close, ask the students to pray specifically about what God is calling them to do individually and corporately to serve the community.

Join together to sing "Trust and Obey." Then lead in a prayer such as the following: God of the Israelites, we know that we also rebel and fail to listen to your will. Please open our hearts and minds so that we can hear and have the courage to follow your will for our lives. Amen.

# Improving Community

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To discover why God called judges to lead the people of Israel; (2) to understand that God allows us to suffer the consequence of our choices; (3) to repent of our bad choices and follow the true God in faith.

**Background Scripture:** Judges 10:6–11:33; 21:25 **Scripture Selection:** Judges 10:10-18

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* John 4:23-24. *Hymns:* “All Creatures of Our God and King,” “Here I Am to Worship,” “Majesty.” *Devotional Reading:* 2 Corinthians 7:5-11.

## Advanced Preparation

Read the scripture through several times. Perhaps you could read it aloud or from different translations. Reading things in a new or different way can give you insight into the text.

Read this lesson and the one in the student book, highlighting parts you find interesting or want to cover with the class.

Think of ways people respond when asked to do something. These response might include yes, no, maybe, not now, etc. Write some or all of these words on various sizes of poster board or construction paper and display around the learning area.

If you have Internet access in your class area, plan to view a clip from the movie *The Lion King* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykbn-yzFgBo>).

You will need pens or pencils and index cards.

## Welcome/Introduction

As class members arrive, help them to feel welcome. Take care of any regular business of the class such as receiving an offering, taking attendance, or making announcements. Invite a volunteer to open the class with prayer.

Call attention to the signs posted around the room. Encourage comments as to what these words have in common. Explain that all of these words are responses people might give when asked to do something. Then ask if anyone has ever changed his or her mind after having responded. Allow time for class members to share briefly. Tell students that this week’s lesson deals with the concept of God changing God’s mind. Then ask: How does it make you feel to think about God changing his mind? Why?

## Exploring the Scripture

A series of judges led the people of Israel during the time of their occupation of Canaan. However, it seems that no judge ever led all twelve tribes; some judges may have been contemporaries, serving different tribes at the same time.

There were five “major judges,” including one woman. These judges were military leaders as well as civil administrators. They likely also acted as an appellate court. This system of having the leader of God’s people also serve as a judge seems to have started with Moses, who settled matters between persons and also advocated for the people before God. However, neither Moses nor Joshua are considered to be among the judges of Israel.

As this lesson is the fourth one from the Book of Judges, you and your students have likely seen the emergence of a pattern of behavior. God raises up a strong leader who delivers the people from their oppressors. The people follow God as long as this leader lives. Then they return to their former ways and the cycle repeats itself.

In this week’s passage from Judges we once again hear the people crying out for deliverance. They are

begging God to help them out of their misery and oppression. The people even go so far as to admit that their sin has caused this separation. One could argue that their admission was a step in the right direction.

Rather than allowing the people to continue in this pattern, God said no. God suggested they seek the help of the gods they had been worshiping. However, God changed his mind, but only after the people changed their ways. When the people put away their idols and worshiped only God, God heard their prayers.

### **Digging Deeper**

As a class, discuss the state in which the Israelites found themselves at the beginning of the scripture passage. Then ask students: What parallels might we draw between the Israelites and any modern-day situations? Why is it so hard to hear *no*, especially from God? How do you react when God tells you no?

Distribute pens or pencils and index cards. Suggest students write down times that God said no to them. On the other side have them write why they believe God said no. Assure class members that they will not be asked to share these reflections with others. As they write, encourage students to think about how God has been active in their lives. When most students seem to be finished, ask: What did you learn? How did those experiences change your relationship with God?

Have a volunteer read “God Said What?” (student book, pages 48-49) beginning with the paragraph that says “God was fed up.” Discuss the questions that follow.

Suggest class members think of a time when they had to suffer the consequences of their actions or they have had to let others face such consequences. Have them consider the following questions, sharing their responses with one or two other people: At what point did you (or the other person) admit responsibility? What was necessary to resolve the situation? How did the experience affect future decisions?

### **Living the Faith**

As a class talk about these questions: At what moment do you think God decided to rescue the Israelites? when they first asked? when they repented? earlier than that? The way you answer this question tells a lot about how you view God and your relationship with God. This author believes that God made the choice to save the Israelites when the original covenant of grace was made. However, that covenant did not mean that the Israelites (nor we) would be saved from the consequences of sin.

The people of Israel seemed to think that if something happened in the past it didn’t matter. They asked God for help and wanted God to ignore their previous infidelity. But God could not ignore the infidelity still present in their hearts. God knew that they needed to learn from their mistakes, as do we.

Play the clip from *The Lion King*. If you cannot view it, give this synopsis: Simba and Rafiki are in the field together talking about the past, when Rafiki hits Simba in the head with a stick. Simba asks “Why did you do that?” Rafiki replies “It doesn’t matter; it’s in the past.” Rafiki swings the stick at Simba again and Simba ducks. He has learned from the past, and changed responses for the better.

Ask students: How does this scene relate to the scripture lesson? In what ways does God want us to change our responses? What does it mean to follow God in faith?

### **Closing**

Join in singing one of the suggested hymns. Close by praying the following prayer or one of your own: God of grace, We know that we, like the Israelites, have idols in our lives. Help us to identify and remove them so that we can trust and love you with our whole heart. Thank you for your faithfulness, mercy, and love. Help us to show mercy and love to others. Amen.

# Preparing for Leadership

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To read how God prepared Manoah and his wife to give birth to Samson and parent him for God's purposes; (2) to understand that quality leadership requires thoughtful, obedient, and careful preparation; (3) to plan ways to identify and support emerging leaders in the church.

**Background Scripture:** Judges 13; 21:25 **Scripture Selection:** Judges 13:1-8, 24-25

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 95:1-2. *Hymns:* "Take Time to be Holy," "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," "Where He Leads Me." *Devotional Reading:* Romans 2:1-8.

## Advanced Preparation

Begin your preparation this week with prayer. Pray for each of your students and any needs in their lives of which you are aware. Pray that your preparation will lead to engaging discussion and new insights.

Read Judges 13 in its entirety. Familiarize yourself with this lesson and the lesson in the student book. Highlight and take note of the items you feel the class would benefit from or enjoy the most.

Contact some class members during the week to ask them to be prepared to share about their baptisms (location, age, minister presiding, and so forth).

Gather some baptismal gowns from church members to display in the classroom. Gather shells or pictures of baptisms as well.

## Welcome/Introduction

Greet each student as he or she enters the room, making everyone feel welcome. During your gathering time, encourage class members to share some of the events of the week with one another. Share updates about any projects in which the class is involved. What are the next steps?

Allow time to make any necessary announcements, collect the offering, and take attendance. Open with prayer, including a time of silence during which class members may mention those joys or concerns for which they would like others to pray.

Call attention to the baptismal gowns as well as the shells and pictures of baptisms displayed in the learning area. Then invite class members to share a little about their baptism. If students other than the ones you contacted want to share, allow them to do so as long as there is time.

Introduce *baptism* as a means of preparation for living a life as a child of God. Samson's parents prepared him for a life of service from the time of conception. He was "set apart."

## Exploring the Scripture

Again the Israelites had slipped away from following God. This time they were so downtrodden that they did not even call out for God to rescue them from the Philistines. However, God saw their need and sent a deliverer in the form of a child whom we know as Samson.

God had specific plans for Samson. To accomplish those plans, Samson was to be set apart—devoted to God. When the angel told Manoah and his wife that they would have a child, he also told them that this child would be a nazirite from his birth. In fact, Manoah's wife was even told not to drink wine or eat unclean foods during her pregnancy.

The outward signs that a man was a nazirite were not cutting one's hair or beard, abstaining from wine and other strong drinks, and avoiding contact with dead bodies (including animals). The life-long nazirites mentioned in the Bible include Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist.

God gave Samson the gift of great physical strength, which allowed him to perform amazing feats for which he quickly became known and feared—by his own people and by the Philistines. While God had

great plans for Samuel, Samuel's humanness got in the way. He did not devote himself to seeking God's will or even to living the life of a nazirite. In fact, he wasn't even particularly religious! Samuel was headstrong and appears to have had little self-control. He apparently was a womanizer and became involved with various Philistine women.

Seeking to discover the source of his strength so that they could destroy it, the Philistines took advantage of Samson's weakness for their women. Delilah used her feminine wiles to get Samson to reveal the secret of his strength and then betrayed him.

Sadly, Samson did not use the gifts God had given him to deliver the Israelites from Philistine rule. In his death he killed more Philistines than he had during the rest of his life. However, at his death he called on God to give him strength one last time, a final demonstration of his faith.

### **Digging Deeper**

Being set apart is a strong biblical metaphor for the people of faith. Again and again God called them to be set apart so that others would recognize them as belonging to God. Talk with the class about the idea of being "set apart." Then ask: In what ways are Christians called to be clearly different? How do we show that we are God's children? In what areas do we need to improve?

When someone agrees to serve as a leader, those whom they are leading expect certain things from them. Invite students to list some qualities they expect from a leader. Say: "Some people who serve as leaders do not need to be in those positions. Quality leadership requires thoughtful, obedient, and careful preparation." Then ask class members: How does our church, community, nation prepare people to serve as leaders? How do we support them in that role? Why is such preparation and support important?

### **Living the Faith**

Have class members identify people from your congregation or others within the Cumberland Presbyterian Church who are emerging as leaders. If students have difficulty thinking of any emerging leaders, suggest they think of people who have recently agreed to chair a committee, accepted the call to ordained ministry, are serving as a first-time elder, are new to the teaching ministry of your congregation, those who seem to have God's wisdom in their words, and so forth.

Once you have identified some emerging leaders, discuss possible ways of supporting and encouraging them in their ministry. Some suggestions might include sponsoring a teacher or elder training event, paying part or all of a person's registration fee to attend a leader conference, writing a note of appreciation/encouragement, praying for the person and his or her work, and so forth. Create a list of these suggestions and covenant with one another to do one or more of them during the following week.

### **Closing**

As you prepare to close the lesson, have students divide into pairs or groups of three. Ask them to take turns praying for one another. Encourage them to pray that the other person's life and witness will be that which God wants. Ask God to conform their hearts and minds to God's will. Thank God for them, for their lives, their presence, and their faith. After an appropriate amount of time has passed, close the group with the following prayer:

God above, yet present with us now, we thank you for your constant love and mercy. We are thankful that you have given us a witness to your mighty acts in scripture. We pray that you would strengthen us to be women and men of faith in this world. Help us to give voice to our beliefs and to share the love and mercy of Christ with this world you created and love. Help us to encourage and support those whom you have called to be leaders. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

# Choosing Community Wisely

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To examine the story of Ruth, a Moabite who chose to make her home in Naomi's Israelite community; (2) to consider the multiple community relationships that people build, such as family, friends, town, work, and church; (3) to identify and choose a primary community that will love and nurture us in our faith.

**Background Scripture:** Ruth 1:8-18 **Scripture Selection:** Ruth 1:8-18

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 100:1-3. *Hymns:* "King of Grace," "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "A Shelter in the Time of Storm." *Devotional Reading:* Romans 10:5-13.

## Advanced Preparation

The remaining three lessons in this quarter are from the Book of Ruth. Read all four chapters of the Book of Ruth as you begin to prepare for this lesson. Some biblical commentaries on Ruth might provide additional insight or new information about this story.

Take a look at the classroom area. Remove objects that may have been used to study Joshua or Judges. Add a map that shows the distance between Bethlehem and Moab.

Locate images of Ruth (children's Sunday school teachers, your local library, or online). She has been the subject of many artists, including a well-known painting by William Blake entitled "Naomi Entreating Ruth and Orpah." Place these images around your class area.

The Book of Ruth deals with complex and potentially painful issues. Be aware of those people in your class who may be grieving the loss of a child or a spouse or who may not have had enough to eat. This story may be very personal and painful for them.

Contact your local Department of Children's Services to see if someone would be able to talk with the class about the foster care program.

Provide a copy of section 6.15 of the *Confession of Faith* for each student.

You will need an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk as well as pencils and paper.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome class members as they arrive. Encourage them to take some time to view the art work you have placed in the area. Those students who are familiar with the story of Ruth will recognize the scenes.

Allow time for routine opening activities such as making announcements, hearing prayer concerns, taking attendance, etc. Open the class with prayer and include the prayer requests mentioned.

Ask class members: What comes to mind when you hear the term *mother-in-law*? Introduce the lesson by saying, "Often mothers-in-law are the subject of jokes and are seen in a negative light. However, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is one of love, devotion, and respect."

## Exploring the Scripture

Scholars disagree as to the time period during which the Book of Ruth was written. Some claim that it could have been written during David's reign; others think it was written many, many years after the death of David. The language used in the book does not allow proper dating.

In stark contrast to Judges, the Book of Ruth shows us a community that did what was right in God's eyes. It is "the story of God's grace in the midst of difficult circumstances. Ruth's story occurred during the time of the judges—a period of disobedience, idolatry, and violence. Even in times of crisis and deepest despair, there are those who follow God and through whom God works. No

matter how discouraging or antagonistic the world may seem, there are always people who follow God. He will use anyone who is open to him to achieve his purposes” (*Life Application Bible*, NIV, Introduction to Ruth).

Our fascination with the characters of Ruth, Naomi and Boaz notwithstanding, “God is the primary actor in the drama” (Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth, The Anchor Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 29). Even though human beings are free moral agents, God’s unseen hand directs events to accomplish his purpose, transforming Naomi’s sorrow into exultant joy and rewarding Ruth’s commitment to Israel’s God and community with an enduring place of honor in its heritage” (*The Spirit-Filled Life Bible*, NKJV, Introduction to Ruth).

## **Digging Deeper**

The lives of most people are filled with a variety of relationships. Encourage class members to identify some of their own relationships, which might include, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc. “You can’t choose your family, but you can choose your friends,” is a familiar saying. However, in this instance Naomi and Ruth basically did choose their family. Their relationship was so strong that they were family.

Invite class members to share those things that are important to them when forming relationships. Then ask: Are each of those things present in every relationship? Why or why not? How do those key elements affect the strength of the relationship?

For many people the family unit is their primary source of love, nurture, and support. However, there are increasing numbers of people for whom that is not true. While everyone needs love, nurture, and support, children are the ones least able to find it outside of the family.

If you have a guest from the Department of Children’s Services, invite that person to share about the foster care program. Or gather information about the services offered by the Cumberland Presbyterian Children’s Home. You can contact them at 940-382-5112 or cpch@cpch.org. Explore ways you can support either of these programs.

## **Living the Faith**

Give each student a copy of section 6.15 from the *Confession of Faith*. Have students read it carefully, circling any words or phrases that stand out to them. When everyone has had a chance to read the section, invite class members to share the words or phrases they circled. Write those words and phrases on the erasable board or newsprint. Then ask: What does this definition of family say about how we should live as a church family?

Encourage class members to form groups of two or three people. Give each group pens or pencils and paper. Using the definition of family from the *Confession of Faith*, suggest they create a list of things that the church should do to live out this definition. Allow time for each group to share at least one response. Highlight a few responses that the class feels your church could or should be doing. Suggest class members pray about those responses during the week. Next week be prepared to plan how you will address those issues.

## **Closing**

Join in singing or reading from the hymn “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.” Read Romans 10:5-13 as a benediction.

Close with the following prayer, or one of your own: O God who loves, nurtures, and supports us, thank you for those people and communities who also love and support us. Help us, as your church, to offer love and support to others who need to experience it.



# Depending on Community

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To understand the practice of gleaning and how it affected the actions of Boaz; (2) to identify those in need in our communities and to make appropriate responses; (3) to commit to ministries that empower the poor.

**Background Scripture:** Ruth 2–3; Leviticus 19:9-10 **Scripture Selection:** Ruth 2:8-18

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 100:4-5. *Hymns:* “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us,” “It Is Well with My Soul,” “Seek Ye First.” *Devotional Reading:* Proverbs 22:1-9.

## Advanced Preparation

Read the Background Scripture as well as Leviticus 19:9, 23:22, which talks about gleaning.

Research the biblical mandate regarding gleaning. Look for current examples of this practice.

Gather statistics about poverty in your area and in the world. For example, two-thirds of the world’s population lives below the United States poverty line. Post this information in the area where your class meets. Be prepared to call attention to the blessings we experience in contrast to the needs of others.

Secure a copy of the NOOMA video, *Rich*, by Rob Bell. You can order it online at <http://store.flannel.org/films/nooma/013.html>. It is available for download. If you plan to use this video, it is twelve minutes long, so plan accordingly. You will also need the equipment on which to play the DVD.

Provide a simple snack such as crackers or pretzels. Break the crackers or pretzels. Bring napkins or small plates on which to put the snack. You might also want to have a pitcher of water and cups available.

You will need index cards and pens as well as an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk.

## Welcome/Introduction

Welcome class members as they arrive. Spend time sharing any announcements or updates that are needed. Take time to take attendance, ask for a volunteer to check on anyone who has been absent. Allow time for prayer requests and other items of importance to your faith community.

Offer the snack to your students. Point out that usually the broken pieces are the leftovers. Then ask: How would you responded if I told you that for the rest of your life you could eat only other people’s leftovers? How would you feel? What would you think? Explain that this lesson will help the class to explore the practice of gleaning as mandated in the Old Testament.

## Exploring the Scripture

This week’s lesson focuses on Boaz. He has earned the reputation of being a good man. He follows the gleaning practices outlined in Leviticus in order to care for the poor. He greets his workers with blessings. The author has gone to great lengths to let the reader know that Boaz is an above board, stand-up guy.

Review the Leviticus scripture along with any additional information you found about gleaning with the class. Talk with students about gleaning as an economic practice and as a spiritual practice. Talk about the reality of gleaning in today’s world. Is it practical? Is it something that would help those who are in need?

From the account in the Book of Ruth, Boaz was especially generous with Ruth. He not only allowed her to glean in his fields, but offered her protection as well as sharing his food and water with her. Ruth was a stranger and a foreigner; Boaz certainly went beyond what was required.

In biblical times those with whom a person ate defined that person. You did not share food with people who were outcasts because you lost some of your good name by doing so. Yet Boaz sat with the poorest of the poor. He gave Ruth so much food that she had leftovers to share with Naomi. It is one thing to give away your leftovers; it is another to give so much that the recipient has leftovers.

## Digging Deeper

Call attention to the statistics on poverty posted in the class area. Ask class members: How generous are you? How easy or difficult would it be for you to follow the example of Boaz? Remember, Ruth was not the only person gleaning in Boaz's fields. Boaz is an example to us. He shows us what stewardship can look like. By giving to those in need, he shows that what he has received from God is a blessing to be shared with others.

**Option:** If you plan to use the Rob Bell video, play it now.

Invite class members to identify groups of people in your community who are in need. Be specific about the need as well. Then have students list the things they do individually and as part of other groups to help those people. Write their responses in parallel columns on a piece of newsprint or an erasable board. Compare the two lists. Then ask students: What needs are not being met? How can we share that with which God has so richly blessed us? How does our congregation share with others the gifts God has bestowed? Remind class members that everything they have is a gift from God and that even in bad economic times they can share proportionately.

Last week you asked class members to pray about what it would look like for the church to live out being a family. Encourage them to share their feelings about those responses and plan how they will implement any changes.

## Living the Faith

Boaz was a man of great faith. He lived a life that set him apart from the crowd. Give each person two index cards and a pencil or pen. Ask class members: If someone was to look at your life, your actions, what conclusion would they draw about your faith? Have them write their response on one card. Then ask: What conclusion would you like for others to draw about you? What steps can you take to help them see your faith more clearly? Suggest they write their responses on the other index card. Encourage students to take this card home and put it in a place where they will see it daily, perhaps on a mirror or computer screen, to remind them of the actions they need to adopt to show others their faith.

The number of people in need of basic necessities is increasing rapidly due to the current economic issues in the United States. The price of food is increasing, especially meat and fresh fruits and vegetables, but people's incomes are not. One way your congregation can help people to stretch their food dollars is by serving as a host site for Angel Food Ministries. This non-profit, non-denominational organization provides food relief to communities throughout the United States. Generally, one unit of food assists in feeding a family of four for about one week. The food is the same quality one could purchase at a grocery store. There are no qualifications, minimums, income restrictions, or applications. Everyone is encouraged to participate. Some churches even encourage participants to apply the money they saved to help someone else in need. For additional information, visit <http://www.angelfoodministries.com>.

## Closing

Next week is the last lesson of the quarter. Follow up on any projects that have been started. Make plans to continue them as needed.

Close by asking the class to read Proverbs 22:1-9 together from *The Message* translation if possible. Ask class members to join in a sentence prayer, each one adding a sentence asking God to guide the community of faith in its use of God's blessings. Encourage the class to post their index cards at home as a way of motivating them to be like Boaz.

# Caring for One Another

**Lesson Aim:** (1) To recount the story of Boaz's actions before the elders of Bethlehem; (2) to value the importance of following ethical community practices in making important transactions affecting the entire community; (3) to assess what we can do to undergird our faith community.

**Background Scripture:** Ruth 4 **Scripture Selection:** Ruth 4:1-10

**Worship Suggestions:** *Opening Sentences:* Psalm 34. *Hymns:* "Fill My Cup, Lord," "God Will Make a Way," "Come, Every One Who Is Thirsty." *Devotional Reading:* Philippians 1:3-11.

## Advanced Preparation

Early in the week read the last chapter of the Book of Ruth. If you have time, re-read the whole book. There may be things that you overlooked previously that you want to include with this final lesson.

Spend time in prayer for each of your students. Ask God to show them where the Holy Spirit is moving in their lives and in the world around them. Ask God to show you ways to encourage each student this week.

Gather pictures of various pieces of property. Attach for sale signs to each picture. On the front of the sign indicate an amazingly good price; on the back of the sign write something about the property that would make it less desirable. For example, has termites, is located next to a land fill, etc. Display these pictures in the learning area. You will use these signs as part of an activity.

You will need paper, pens, an erasable board or newsprint and markers or chalk, and index cards.

Gather pictures of the people of your church or have available copies of the pictorial or printed church directory. Make sure you have enough of these for small groups to view.

## Welcome/Introduction

Greet students warmly. Invite them to look at the pictures of various properties that are displayed. Encourage each student to identify one or two properties in which they would be personally interested. They are not to remove the pictures from the display.

Allow time for the class' routine activities such as recording attendance, making announcements, and hearing prayer requests. Invite a volunteer to open the class time with prayer.

Act as a real estate agent who is showing the properties to the class. By show of hands or another way, ask class members to indicate their interest in each property. Ask what makes the property desirable to them. After everyone has had a chance to pick a property, reveal the conditions on the back of the sign. Then ask if they are still interested in purchasing the property now that they know the "rest of the story." Explain that the lesson begins with a real estate transaction, but there is a catch to the great-sounding deal.

## Exploring the Scripture

The lesson does not include chapter three of Ruth, which explains how the relationship between Boaz and Ruth changed and grew. Review this chapter with the class, allowing them to discuss its implications on the story.

Some of the customs referenced in the scripture may not be familiar to class members. Review these practices, especially the concept of levirate marriage, which is discussed on page 60 in the student book.

The idea of inheritance was very important in biblical times. It was the main way men had of providing for their family and maintaining their names in a community. Jacob's well is one such example. From the time of its origin, that well has been known as Jacob's well. Having one's name tied to a piece of property assured that one was never forgotten; that one went on forever.

Legal contracts and oaths were often sealed by the removal and giving of a sandal. Scholars are uncertain as to why the Israelites used this process.

Remind class members that Rahab, the prostitute who helped the spies in Jericho, was the great-great-grandmother of King David. By marrying Boaz, Ruth also joins the lineage of David. Since David was an ancestor of Jesus, they also became part of the lineage of Jesus. Ask students: Why do you think it is important to know that foreigners were part of the lineage of Jesus?

### **Digging Deeper**

Briefly summarize “Ace in the Hole” on pages 70-71 in the student book. Invite a volunteer to read the paragraph that begins “Interpretations of the interchange...” Discuss the questions listed in “Think About” at the end of that section. Invite the class to share its reactions to this alternative reading.

Boaz made sure he handled this transaction according to the laws of his community. Ask students: Why is it important for a community to have ethical practices, especially regarding transactions? What might happen if such practices were not in place? How would unethical practices affect the entire community?

At some point in their lives, most people will have to deal with a business or individual who does not observe ethical practices. Bernie Madoff, who defrauded investors of billions of dollars, is one current example. Class members will easily identify others. Encourage students to consider: What is your responsibility to your community, as Christians, when you encounter people who are not ethical? How do you maintain ethical standards in your own practices and transactions? At what point do you give someone the benefit of the doubt, allowing that maybe he or she has changed?

### **Living the Faith**

Have a volunteer read the story that begins in the third paragraph of “Eyes to See, Hearts to Understand,” which starts on page 72 in the student book. Invite comments as to how your congregation would react to this situation?

This morning my pastor shared about a situation that actually transpired several years ago. The owner of the local liquor store was an outcast in his community because of his business. God had been moving in his life, and the man went to church one Sunday. At the end of the service, the man went forward and gave his life to Christ. He wanted to join that church. Unfortunately, the church refused to accept him as a member. That night he took his own life.

Encourage students to identify those groups of people whom the church may have difficulty accepting. Ask: How does our acceptance and/or treatment of such people reflect ethical practices? How can we help the church to respond in ways that reflect God’s love for all people?

Have class members gather in groups of two to three. Provide each group with paper, pens, and a church directory or photos of church members. Then ask: When you look at our congregation, who is missing? Who is not represented? Have each small group write down its observations. The responses may include anything from certain names, to groups such as the infirm, the young, the poor, etc.

Call the groups back together and invite them to share some of their responses. Then brainstorm some ideas for ways to reach these groups or individuals. Ask each student to write down the name of at least one group or person to pray for this week.

### **Closing**

Read Philippians 1:3-11 to the class. Encourage class members to use these verses as a format for their prayers this week. Sing together a verse from one of the suggested hymns. Ask a volunteer to close the lesson in prayer.

Distribute the student books for the next quarter. Remove any items related specifically to this unit.

---

# Evaluation

---

Help to improve the usefulness of this leader's guide by answering the following questions and returning this form, along with your comments and suggestions, to the address listed on the reverse side of this page.

**To what extent was this leader's guide helpful to you?** (Circle the appropriate number. "1" = Not at All and "7" = Extremely.)

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7

**What are the two most helpful things in this guide?**

---

---

**If you could change one thing about the leader's guide, what would it be?**

---

---

**Additional Comments:**

---

---

---

---

---

(Church name—optional)

---

(Your name—optional)

Return Address

---

---

---

Place  
postage  
here.

Encounter  
Discipleship Ministry Team  
8207 Traditional Place  
Cordova, TN 38016

# Coming for Fall 2011

## Tradition and Wisdom

Unit I, "Teaching and Learning," consists of eight lessons based on the wisdom writings of the Bible. These books make little reference to covenant or religious life. They focus instead on human wisdom and transmit lessons learned from experience and tradition. They are the words of a teacher to a student, or a parent to a child, words of wisdom passed on from one generation to another. The first five lessons draw on the wisdom collected by the writers of Proverbs. The next two lessons consider the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. The final lesson comes from the Song of Solomon.

Unit II, "Jesus Teaches Wisdom," has five lessons. These lessons examine parts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and its relationship to the traditional teachings of Mosaic Law. The first four lessons, taken from Matthew 5 and 6, give attention to what Jesus says to disciples about living, forgiving, loving, and praying. The final lesson invites you to hear anew Jesus' words about worry-free living.

---

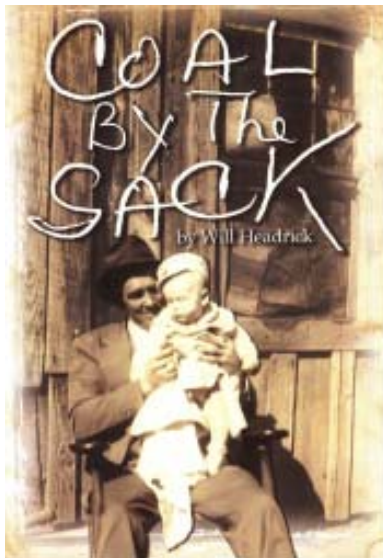
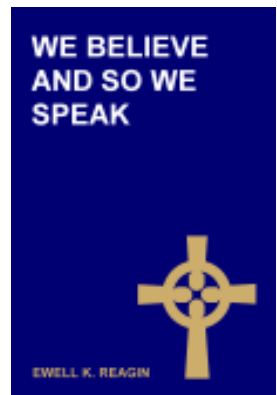
## About the Writer

Don F. Thomas is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister who lives with his wife, Nancy, in Collierville, TN. He is a graduate of Bethel University (BA), Memphis Theological Seminary (MDiv), Boston University (DMin), and The University of North Texas (EdM). He is a Licensed Professional Counselor (MHSP) in Tennessee and worked for nearly two decades as a mental health therapist and pastoral counselor in Mississippi and Tennessee.

Don currently is Stated Supply at First Presbyterian Church, Paragould, AR, an adjunct Instructor in Pastoral Care at Memphis Theological Seminary, and a religion facilitator in Bethel University's Success Program, teaching courses in Christian Education, Old and New Testament. A member of West Tennessee Presbytery, Don has pastored churches in Texas and Tennessee.

# Check Out These Items

*We Believe and so We Speak: A Statement of the Faith of Cumberland Presbyterians*, by E.K. Reagin. As Cumberland Presbyterians, we are members of the Presbyterian and Reformed family of Christians. In this family there are family characteristics, and there are individual characteristics. We have some of the family traits, and we have some of the marks of an individual, which keep us from being an identical twin. It is the distinguishing character of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church that this book attempts to bring out. We are Cumberland Presbyterians because we have certain characteristics that are peculiar to us as Presbyterians and as Christians. This book focuses on the doctrinal issues. This classic resource is being reprinted for the first time since 1960. Price has not yet been determined.



*Coal by the Sack*, by Will Headrick. This book tells the story of the author, a young boy born to a family living in the hills of Northern Georgia. The true account of a boy, who was admittedly different from most of the people he knew, who was abused as a child, and who, more than anything else, did not want to spend his life working in the mills and factories of the area. He overcame many obstacles to reach what seemed the impossible goal of going to college and having a normal family life. Headrick tells his story with humor and honesty. \$19.00.

Will Headrick is a sometimes retired Cumberland Presbyterian minister, counselor, and teacher. He lives in Mobile, Alabama, with his aging dog, Chloe.

*Porch Ponderings*, by Will Headrick. This book is one of uncommon thoughts on common topics. It contains writings about those things Headrick pondered as he sat on his porch. It is not a book to be read from cover to cover in one sitting. It is to be read and pondered one or two pages at a time. So, read a bit. Lay the book aside. Lean back and roll it around in your mind. \$14.95.

## Porch Ponderings



By: Will Headrick

These books are available from Cumberland Presbyterian Resource Distribution. To order, call 901-276-4572, ext. 252 or send an e-mail to [resources@cumberland.org](mailto:resources@cumberland.org).