



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES
SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
7th Grade





Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Overview and Milestones	6
Acknowledgements	7
Providing Feedback	7
Disclaimer	7
Building Block 1: Introduction to Discernment	8
Lesson 1.1: What is Discernment?	9
Lesson 1.2: Guidance for Decision Making	11
Lesson 1.3: Choosing the right Friends	14
Building Block 2: The OT Timeline 1 - Discerning the Pre-Kingdom Era	17
Lesson 2.1: Discerning Literal and Revelatory Meaning in the Old Testament	18
Lesson 2.2: Mankind before the Flood	21
Lesson 2.3: The time of the Patriarchs	23
Lesson 2.4: The exile into Egypt	25
Lesson 2.5: The Journey to Canaan	27
Lesson 2.6: The period of the Judges	29
Lesson 2.7: Israel asks for a King & Review of The Timeline of the Pre-Kingdom	31
Building Block 3: Discerning the Spirit of the New Testament	33
Lesson 3.1: Introduction to the Gospels	34
Lesson 3.2: The 3 Missionary Journeys (Acts)	37
Lesson 3.3: Pauline Letters	39
Lesson 3.4: Catholic Letters	42
Lesson 3.5: Revelation	46
Building Block 4: Discerning the Root of my Identity	49
Lesson 4.1: Defining Oneself	50





Lesson 4.2: Knowledge of God and Ourselves	52
Lesson 4.3: Contentment, Happiness, Joy	54
Lesson 4.4: What is Sin and How Does it Impact Me?	56
Lesson 4.5: Establishing Boundaries	58
Building Block 5: Discerning the True Meaning of Freedom	60
Lesson 5.1: The Meaning of True Freedom	61
Lesson 5.2: Self-Control	63
Lesson 5.3: Substance Abuse	66
Lesson 5.4: Overcoming Temptation	69
Lesson 5.5: Importance and power of obedience	72
Lesson 5.6: St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life	75
Lesson 5.7: An Open Discussion: Review and Q&A	77
Building Block 6: Discerning the Pathway to a Better Life	78
Lesson 6.1: Nourishment and Growth through Scriptural readings	79
Lesson 6.2: Facing Our Daily Challenges: Depression, Loneliness	81
Lesson 6.3: Chastity	84
Lesson 6.4: Honesty & Promises	87
Lesson 6.5: Entitlement	89
Lesson 6.6: Self-Esteem	91
Lesson 6.7: Peer Pressure; Definition and Examples from Scripture	94
Lesson 6.8: Habits	97
Building Block 7: Discerning Ritual Details	99
Lesson 7.1: The Tabernacle of Meeting - Symbolism, History and Outer Court	100
Lesson 7.2: The Tabernacle of Meeting - Inner Court and the Holy of Holies	103
Lesson 7.3: The Sanctuary	106
Lesson 7.4: Symbolism in the Liturgy	109
Lesson 7.5: Christ foreshadowed in the 5 OT offerings	112
Building Block 8: The Bible and You: Discerning Practical Answers	115
Lesson 8.1: Problem Solving: Nehemiah's Model	116
Lesson 8.2: God Cares About You	118
Lesson 8.3: Violence in the Old Testament	120
Lesson 8.4: Bible and Women: Is the Bible Prejudice Against Women?	123
Lesson 8.5: How Can the Bible Help Me?	126



Building Block 9: Discerning God's desires	128
Lesson 9.1: God Is Calling Everyone	129
Lesson 9.2: Repentance—A Permanent Change of Direction, David	131
Lesson 9.3: The Value of Time	134
Lesson 9.4: Growing in God's Grace and Knowledge	136
Lesson 9.5: Eternal Life as God's Sons and Daughters	138
Lesson 9.6: Open Discussion on the difficulties of finding your purpose	140
PK-G12: VERSION 1, 2020-2021 – DRIVE ARCHIVE	142



Introduction

September 11, 2020

"Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide."

St John Chrysostom

The book of Proverbs tells us to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6) Although our Orthodox faith never changes, the society and challenges our children face are always evolving. In light of this constant change, and in honor of the 100 year anniversary of establishment of Sunday school in 2018, the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States began working on a new curriculum named "Children of Light" to equip and educate our children in order to live a life pleasing to God in the midst of the world we live in. St Habib Girgis rightly reminds us that "education is the first need for the community after bread." Seeing the importance of educating our children, great effort was put over the past few years into ensuring a curriculum is developed that would feed our children with the proper foundations and tools appropriate to their age. Every grade will equip the child with strong biblical, liturgical, spiritual and morally appropriate lessons allowing them to grow in faith while providing them with tools to navigate the day to day issues they face in society so that they may be the true light of the world they are each called to be.

May this new curriculum be a tool that allows our children to grow in wisdom and in love of God, living up to their calling of being light of the world and true children of Light.

Bishop Youssef

Bishop Basil

Bishop Gregory

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States

Overview and Milestones



Theme of the Year

Christian Discernment

Rationale: Throughout this year youth will begin to question their parent's religious beliefs and self-impose on themselves a certain level of peer pressure. This year then becomes critical for them to know, understand and choose, on their own, their Christian way of life. This is achieved through teaching and building in them the virtue of Discernment. Being moody, impulsive, with extreme emotions, unable to make decisions yet desiring to be independent; learning and acquiring discernment throughout the year is imperative.

Psych Analysis

 Physical	Increased energy, Physical activities and sports valued, Worry about body
 Intellect	Thinks abstract, Concerned with rules, Weak Cause-Effect understanding, Questions parents belief
 Social	Identity Struggle, Moody, values Friendship with both sexes, Less affectionate to parents (they interfere too much)
 Detailed Characteristics	

Building Blocks

BB1: Discernment

What is Discernment?

BB4: Discerning my Journey to Joy

Defining oneself, Knowledge of God and Ourselves, Contentment, Happiness, Joy, What is sin and how does it impact me?, Establishing Boundaries

BB7: Discerning Ritual details

The tabernacle of Meeting, The Ark of Covenant, The Sanctuary, Tapers and Incense in the Church, Christ foreshadowed in the 5 OT offerings

BB2: The OT Timeline - The Pre-Kingdom Era

Allegory vs. Literal Reading, Mankind before the Flood, The time of the Patriarchs, The exile into Egypt, The Journey to Canaan, The period of the Judges, Review of The Timeline of the Pre-Kingdom

BB5: Discerning Freedom

The Meaning of True Freedom, Self-Control, Danger of Satan, Overcoming Temptation, Balance between Obedience and Freedom, Marriage and Sexuality, BB Review and Q&A

BB8: Discerning Practical Answers

Nehemiah's Model of Problem Solving, God Cares About You, Violence in the Old Testament, Is the Bible Prejudiced Against Women?, How Can the Bible Help Me?

BB3: Discerning the Spirit of The NT

Introduction to the Gospels, The 3 Missionary Journeys, Pauline Letters, Catholic Letters, Revelation

BB6: The Pathway to a Better Life

Guidance for Decision Making, Choosing the right Friends, Growing through the Bible, Facing Our Daily Challenges, Chastity, Honesty & Promises, Entitlement, Self-Esteem, Peer Pressure, Good studying habits

BB9: Discerning God's desires

God Is Calling Everyone, David teaches us Repentance, The Value of time, Growing in God's Grace and Knowledge, Eternal Life as God's Sons and Daughters, Open Discussion on Finding your Purpose

End of Year Milestones & Objectives

 Scripture	+ Discern the pre-kingdom stories & characters + Journals/Writes the Personal messages from God	 Spiritual	+ Differentiates between freedom with God and freedom in the world + Difference between dating and the beauty & holiness of Marriage
 Social	+ Withstands peer pressure in decision making + Discerns what is right and wrong (based on bible and tradition) + Values the appropriate friends + Discusses their identity struggles	 Rituals	+ Attends Vespers & Praises once/month + Reasons behind icon placement in church + Knows the liturgical symbolisms



Acknowledgements

The Diocese would like to thank all those who helped in this curriculum. There were collaborators and volunteers from across the globe throughout the US, Canada, and Qatar. We would also like to thank St. Mary and St. Mark of Edmonton for their significant collaboration in this service. May God bless and reward all to those who have labored and prayed for this curriculum.

Providing Feedback

Feedback, suggestions and material may be submitted at any time in the following [form](#).

Disclaimer

Only the content presented on this curriculum has been reviewed and verified. The provided links have also been reviewed. However, the remainder of the content of these websites were out of the scope of the review.



Building Block I: Introduction to Discernment



Theme: Christian Discernment

Building Block I:
Discernment



Lesson I.I: What is Discernment?

Objective

To understand how to differentiate between living a moral life and having the gift of discernment from God.

Application

To open up our hearts so that we can grow to discern God's voice.

To be able to make choices based on discernment, rather than following the worldly flow.

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 John 4:1](#), [Hebrews 5:12-14](#), [Matthew 7:15](#), [Romans 12:2](#)



Liturgy: [Cyrillian Liturgy](#)



Patristics: [Ladder of Divine Ascent](#)



Story: [St. Paul the Hermit](#)



Other: [Discernment HG Bishop Youssef \(Arabic\)](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Discernment is an act of fair judgment

Consider discussing, if the US Olympics imposed no laws on stimulant drugs, would athletic competitions still be fair?

- Judges in the US Olympics have agreed that all athletes should be tested for stimulants in their body before running a marathon, hence making the game truly fair down to the core.
- Without any test, Christ was able to tell apart the one disciple across the table that was going to betray Him. He was able to “discern” which disciple truly loved Him, and only those who upheld the faith to the last breath received the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection.
- In light of that, we learn to tell apart the close friends that we confide in, and we pray in the liturgy of St. Cyril that “as we give a spiritual greeting, we may flee from the likeness of Judas the traitor” (Prayer of Reconciliation).
- Now resume defining discernment; discernment is the lens that we use to identify the principles of fairness and justice, as well as principles of true love and genuine friendship.

+ Discernment is a strategy of learning

Consider discussing the differences between the Pharisees’ way of teaching and that of Christ. Will you heed the words of a hypocritical teacher?

- “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ravenous wolves” - Matthew 7:15
- “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” - 1 John 4:1
- Now resume defining discernment; discernment is an essential virtue of telling apart true from false church doctrines and teachings.

+ Discernment is a virtue to be practiced

- In the Sacrament of Chrismation each one of us was sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit which guides us
- We continually call upon the Holy Spirit to guide us in discerning His presence.
- Scripture warns of “other spirits” which can be deceptive and, hence, certainly not of God.
- The gift of discernment is critical in determining that which is genuine from that which is not.
- Often we find ourselves in situations in which we are unsure as to that which we feel or experience is of the Holy Spirit or of “another spirit.”
- Carefully and prayerfully weighing such situations and measuring them against the revelation as delivered to us through Jesus Christ is critical.
- “A discerning man, when he eats grapes, takes only the ripe ones and leaves the sour. Thus also the discerning mind carefully marks the virtues which he sees in any person. A mindless man seeks out the vices and failings ... Even if you see someone sin with your own eyes, do not judge;



for often even your eyes are deceived." (St. John Climacus, Ladder of Divine Ascent 10.16-17)

- How does a judge come to a judgement ? He judged according to the law he was given. Likewise, we have the word of God, to discern what is right and wrong. Not to judge another person, but to know what is right and what is wrong and how to make our own choices with discernment (also called righteous judgement). This is a gift from God.
- HG Bishop Youssef once asked, "Should we give poor people money directly into their hands?" Discuss the risks of doing that (some poor people tend to buy marijuana with that money). Instead of doing that, try giving them food or other supplies instead of solid money.
- St. Paul once thought to himself, should he keep half the inheritance of his father and split the rest with his brother? He inspected the possible ways of that money, and realized that he does not need any to pursue Christ. Instead of splitting the inheritance, he gave it all to his brother!
- Now resume defining discernment; discernment is a sign of "spiritual maturity" and a necessary virtue in the Christian life (Hebrews 5:12-14)

+ Discernment in practice

- Constantly review the word of God and use it as your life manual at every road crossing
- Inspect your ways instead of going with the flow of everyone else
- Pray that God may help you discern the voice of the Holy Spirit that is within you, hear the voice of God more clearly, and fulfill what He asks of you in the Bible
- Give poor people their material needs and other supplies instead of solid money
- Inspect the teachings that you are being taught according to the true doctrine
- Discernment apart from prayer, fasting, listening, and spiritual openness firmly rooted in humility and the desire to discover God's will is impossible.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 1.2: Guidance for Decision Making

Building Block 1:
Discernment



Objective

To understand God's will for our life and what the bible says about making decisions

Application

Let God guide you in making tough decisions and even the little ones that we make daily.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Proverbs 4:11](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [1 Cor. 10:31](#); [Eph. 5:18](#); [Rom. 12:11-17](#); [Micah 6:8](#); [Isaiah 1:17](#)



Liturgy: [According to Your good will, O God](#)



Patristics: St. Ephraim the Syria



Story: [Ruth](#)



Other: [Your every Decision Counts! - HG Bishop Angelos](#); [Fr. Pishoy Wasfy/Part 1: Involving God](#), [Part 2: Emotions or Rationale?](#), [Part 3: The Checklist](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Introduction:

- Why are decisions important?
- Does every decision matter?
- Does God care about the little things in my life?
- What does it mean when God says "abide in me"?
- So.... Is decision-making easy since we make decisions every day of our life?
- No one is born with perfect decision making; it is a skill that we should work on.
- Decision-making is a skill, and it needs a lot of practice just like any other sport, you practice it as much as you can.
- "Salvation is down to our daily choices, we often live carelessly and thinking that won't affect our salvation. Salvation is about daily sustained choices that we make. Do we make conscious right decisions for the small things or only when it comes to the big things. You have to work at salvation daily, it isn't something that just happens." (HG Bishop Angelos).
- Many of us think oh when I get older or when I get to college, high school...whatever it may be....no it doesn't work like that...you have to be working on it so that it comes naturally so that when you NEED your faith and God in your big decisions you have that discernment we talked about last week, so that you are able to hear what God actually wants from you
- Many think we need God when we apply to college, apply for work, start to pursue someone for marriage but if you don't involve God in the little things, how will you involve him and hear him in the big things
- Ex working out ...you cannot go to the gym every 5 months and expect to pick up the same weights or be at the same level bc u haven't been working out daily to sustain same with faith we can't come and expect to hear when we haven't been listening

+ How do people make decisions?

- Some rely on gut feelings
- Some rely on facts and analysis
- Some rely on experiences (I've experienced something like this so I know)

+ Principles for Good Decision Making:

- Good decision making begins by discerning the Will of God

- Good decision making balances logic and feelings
- Good decision making can be checklisted

+ Involve God

- You must first discern the will of God.
- Our attitude of decision making should be “not my will but Thy will be done”
- How do I know what the will of God for me is? God delights in revealing His will...He isn't trying to hide and not reveal it. Those who are EAGER to follow His commandments and teachings. Proverbs 2:2-6, “So that you incline your ear to wisdom, And apply your heart to understanding; Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will understand the fear of the Lord, And find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;”
- You cannot make decisions without discernment, Hebrews 5:12-14
- How does God reveal His will? Through His Holy Spirit - that's why the children of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit they tend to tell right away what the will of God is in discernment . You have to be a person of prayer, He reveals His will through prayer, Psalm 119:105. Through Guidance of father of confession, Hebrews 13:7

Consider asking: how would you react if your close friends suggested that you hang out together with them and skip liturgy?

- Ask them if they hear a voice in their head telling them that this decision does not feel right and that their Father in heaven would not like that.
- The Holy Spirit guides them by telling them that stealing is not right.
- “I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths.” (Proverbs 4:11)
- God does not leave us alone, but He guides us through His Holy Spirit, through wisdom, throughout our daily life.
- God reveals His will through the Holy Spirit: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” (John 16:13)

+ What are sound decisions? And how do I make them?

- “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Philippinas 2:13)
- “Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” (Proverbs 11:14)
- Remember this verse, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- Sound decisions are those which benefit me, get me closer to God, and benefit others.
- Good decision-making begins by discerning the word of God.
- Everything you do in your life, every step, and every decision, do it for the Glory of God. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- We learn everything from our Teacher, Jesus. When he came on earth, He showed us how we should live our lives.
- When He was faced with a strong decision: He said, “Father, if it is Your will, take the cup away from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42)
- The story of Ruth when she made a decision to leave her family and go with Naomi and serve her. By making this decision, Ruth followed God's will in her life, and she became from the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

+ Balancing Logic with Feelings

- Good decisions balance logic with feelings and emotions
- You need to slow down when you rush to send a text or rush to action because you want your frontal brain to have time to process before your emotions take over

Fun fact: the limbic system (where emotions are processed) develops faster than the frontal cortex where your risk taking and planning skills takes place...that's why ppl say wait till you mature or wait till ur older bc ur emotions drive your decisions at a young age

- You need to take a minute to think – keep it as a motto
- Short term benefits vs long term
- Are you doing this to fit in (going to this party, drinking etc) – short term: THINK ABOUT CONSEQUENCES
- Or are you taking a minute to rationalize it and weigh it against your morals and values
- If Jesus was standing there with you right now how would he feel?



+ The Checklist

- Make sure to check these three things...Check your impulsivity; Check your motivation; Check for consequences
- Impulsivity: "Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few." (Ecclesiastes 5:2); "It is a snare for a man to devote rashly something as holy, And afterward to reconsider his vows." Proverbs 20:25)
- Motivation: Motivation – the internal state that arouses and directs and maintains ones behavior. What is the motivation behind the behavior? Our decisions and actions reflect the desires in our hearts (Matthew 12:34). Key question to ask: do I choose to please myself or do I choose to please the Lord?

+ Consequences

- What are the outcomes and consequences of this decision I'm about to make?
- ALL choices have costs
- We have to center our life in God and in Christ
- Ask yourself what will come out of this decision, take a minute
- Is it in line with God's will?

+ How do we know if it is God's Will or our will?

- Many wonder how we know the difference between our will and God's will? How do we know if we did not persuade ourselves to think of something being God's will, but it is our will?
- St. Ephraim the Syrian says, "In the measure to which a man cuts off and humbles his own will, he proceeds toward success. But insofar as he stubbornly guards his own will, so much does he bring harm to himself.
- Pray! Pray for guidance from God in making any decision.
- Make sure your decision follows the Holy Bible. Sometimes, God leads us through verses that provide us with exactly what we need
- Following prayer, confirm your contemplated decision by watching for signs from God in your daily life.
- Following prayers, you need to feel a sense of peace concerning your decision. After prayer, God gives guidance through a settled inward peace, whereas there will be a sense of restlessness toward the wrong decision.
- Finally, you need to heed the direction of your spiritual father. (Suspects Q & A)
- As we say in Liturgy: Liturgy: "According to Your good will, O God, fill our hearts with your peace." - St. Basil Liturgy.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 1.3: Choosing the right Friends

Building Block I:
Discernment



Objective

To understand how to be thoughtful and intentional about friendship choices.

Application

Identify one way he/she can be a good friend and one action they will take towards reaching this goal.

Contemplation on the friends we have now and what kind of friend we are.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Mark 2:1-12](#), [Luke 5:17-26](#), [Proverbs 27:6](#); [Proverbs 27:17](#); [1 Samuel 18:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:10](#)



Liturgy: [The Litany of Peace](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#); [St. John Chrysostom](#); [St. Isaac the Syrian](#)



Story: David and Jonathan, St. Paul and St. Timothy, St. Basil and St. Gregory



Other: [Choosing the Right Friends - HG Bishop Angaelos](#); [Grade 7 Legacy Curriculum Filler Week 5: Friendship](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24)

The origins and meaning of friendship in Christianity

- Friends are individuals who love each other bountifully for their shared views and perspectives of life. Their shared moments together are of indescribable value! Because they both think in similar ways, they have come to pursue the same set of morals, reasoning principles, and beliefs.
- There is such undeniable, essential depth to this friendship that “many waters cannot quench [its] love” (Song of Solomon 8:7).
- St Augustine: “No friends are true friends unless You, my God, bind them fast to one another through the love which is sown in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”
- When Jesus elected the 12 apostles, He sent them out to preach “in pairs”. Similarly, when the abbess of the monastery of Tamav Ereny sent them out to serve, she cautioned them to always stay in pairs in everything they do.
- Why pairs? Why friends? It all centers around why God sent Eve to be with Adam in the garden, so that they can help each other and work in cooperation together. Living and serving in fellowship is just like teamwork in school; you accomplish more with teamwork and escape egoism!

+ “Tell me your friends and I will tell you who you are” (anonymous saying)

The types of friendship and what they say about us

- When you greet a classmate everyday with “Hi, Sally! How are you?” and “Goodbye!”, you have established an acquaintance relationship. Acquaintances are people you check on because they study with you the same course. Visibly, though, there is no depth of love there. Therefore, acquaintances do not count as friends.
- When you invite classmates over for a party, there might be one particular student who will agree with everything you say. She is easygoing, and she avoids arguments and conflicts. She tries to fit in and join you in anything you do. Though you have enjoyed those moments with her, she hardly edified you or helped you pursue more worthwhile activities. All you know about her is that she joins you in various experiences. She does you neither help nor harm. Therefore, she does not count as a friend.
- Did your friends list shrink ten times so far? Though you may have a 1000 friends on facebook, a few genuine friends are way better than a 1000 followers who could cause you to lose your soul (Matthew 16:26). Those genuine friends reveal you. They reveal your personality down to the core.
- We yearn to see in those friends 1. good morals (1 Cor. 15:33), 2. modesty (1 Tim 2:9), 3. honesty (Luke 8:15), 4. abstinence from drinking alcohol

(1 Peter 4:3), 5. law-abiding behavior (Romans 13: 1-7), and 6. ability to control their language (James 1:26). Above all things, that friendship is Christ-centered and bound by mutual trust and mutual edification.

- On this note, we like to keep in mind that part of the litany of peace, “Acquire us to Yourself, O God our Saviour, for we know none other but You. Your Holy Name we utter. May our souls live by Your Holy Spirit and let not the death of sins have dominion over us, we your servant.”
- St John Chrysostom: “Eating and drinking don’t make friendships – such friendship even robbers and murderers have. But if we are friends, if we truly care for one another, let us help one another spiritually. . . Let us hinder those things that lead our friends away to hell.”

+ “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed” (Proverbs 17:17)

Models of friendship, from those who were most related to those who were least related

- David and Jonathan - During the reign of Saul over Israel, a giant man named Goliath would attack and hurt many of the Israelites. David, the son of Jesse, was one brave and faithful shepherd who knew how to defeat Goliath. Over time, Jonathan - Saul’s son - loved that faithful and wise character of David that he established a covenant with him; they became strongly bonded friends despite David’s low status as a young shepherd. Saul resented that friendship, but Jonathan loved David no matter what, and always defended him and stood by his side. He prayed for him and gave him his cloak, sword, bow, and girdle.
 - When Saul and Jonathan died in battle, David said, “I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1:26).
- St. Paul and St. Timothy - Paul went on a missionary trip to Lystra with Barnabas, where he met and converted Timothy and his mother to Christianity. From there on, Timothy attached himself to Paul closely for up to 16 years (50-66 AD). Timothy was so anxious about his youth, his lack of experience, and his stomach ailments. And yet, Paul exhorted him incessantly to “Let no one despise [his] youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity.” No wonder why Paul would continue to send him special letters from abroad (1st and 2nd Timothy), let alone monitor his spiritual growth and help him become a priest!
 - Compared to David and Jonathan, there is a huge gap in age and experience between Timothy and Paul! And yet, it became a memorable friendship to note in Church history. ([check this link for more info](#))
- St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian - Every time you read the prayer of reconciliation during the liturgy, notice both saints asserted the theory of the Triune God really boldly in that prayer. Both saints went to the most prestigious theological seminary in Athens, and they became close friends over time because of the way they both approached theology. They upheld the faith as firmly as ever; and because of that, we credit them with preserving the faith during that tumultuous time (and we also call St. Gregory the “Trinitarian”). When St. Basil died in 379 AD, St. Gregory took it up to himself to finish St. Basil’s work and fight Arianism in the council of Constantinople.
 - So you see, those two saints were bound by their bold orthodox approach of theology, nothing else. Paul and Timothy spent time preaching together, and David and Jonathan watched out for each other during Israel’s tumultuous times, but Basil and Gregory hardly lived in the same place for the rest of their lives and yet made such an iconic friendship in church history.

Consider asking the students of any other renown friendships that come to mind, particularly that of Pope Cyril VI and St. Mina (Mar-Mina), or even that of Abouna Faltaous the Syrian and Pope Shenouda the III. One is a patriarch with all the burdens of the world on his back, while another is a monk who lives a solitary life with ultimate focus on theological studies. Could it also be teachers and servants you look up to?

+ Friendship in action

How will you discern the right friends now that you’ve seen all those examples?

- Christian friends **mutually edify** each other spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We just *feel good* to be around each other, talking, crying, and listening. We trust each other well enough that we can tell each other a hard message with grace and truth, that’s just how much we can touch our friend’s heart with that shared trust and acceptance. We are that one person who is close to their heart, and “as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). “Wounds from a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6).
- Christian friends **love sacrificially**. They “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). Direct your attention to any cross in the room and recall that “Great love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).
- Christian friends **accept unconditionally**. They know each other’s imperfections, and because of that they do not hold onto bitterness or feel easily offended. “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).
- Christian friends stick closer than brothers, and are always there for you. They **trust completely**. They do not betray you, proving themselves not as mere companions but as true, trustworthy brothers. “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24)
- Christian friends keep **healthy boundaries**. A true friend will not come between you and church, you and your parents, or you and your Godly



morality. That friend will wisely avoid intruding and recognize your need to maintain other relationships. Do not be offended when your friend keeps a few things private; know he/she does not mean to offend you.

- St Isaac the Syrian: A chaste body is dearer to God than a pure offering. Both, however, prepare a dwelling-place for the Trinity in the soul. Walk with thy friends in a reserved attitude; in doing so thou wilt be of profit unto thyself and unto them. For usually under the pretext of friendship the soul casts off the reins of watchfulness.



Building Block 2: The OT Timeline I - Discerning the Pre-Kingdom Era



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.1: Discerning Literal and Revelatory Meaning in the Old Testament

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

To differentiate between literal and allegorical interpretations of the Bible.

Application

When you read anything in the Old Testament, try to see if you can find the revelatory meaning.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Romans 5:14](#); [Colossians 2:17](#); [Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1](#); [Hebrews 9:24](#)



Liturgical: [Sunday Theotokia/Midnight Praises](#)



Patristics: [Variety of Commentary on Allegorical Types of the Old Testament](#)



Story: The Book of Song of Songs; The examples of the Rod of Aaron, The Ark, The Burning Bush, etc



Other: [Allegory](#)

➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The Old Testament

- Before the Incarnation and before the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church
- God spoke to the people in the OT directly
- The Orthodox OT has 46 books vs Protestant OT - 39 Books
- The "extra" books found in the Orthodox Bible are called Deuterocanonical Books.
- These books are not considered "genuine" by other churches, but the Orthodox Church considers them genuine.

+ The meaning of Literal and Revelatory

- The Old Testament events carry a literal meaning and a revelatory/prophecy meaning.
- Literal - taking words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or allegory
- Revelatory - Figurative, foreshadowing something to happen in the future, mostly pointing toward the coming of Christ. "Which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." (Colossian 2:17)
- In some sense, People who lived in that time period understood them literally, as it is read today, we look for the revelatory meaning within the text.

+ Allegorical/Revelatory Interpretations

- The word "allegory," is derived from the Greek "alla," meaning "other," and "agoreuo," meaning "proclaim." It originally referred to a figure of speech that Cicero defined as a "continuous stream of metaphors."
- According to St. Augustine, allegory is a mode of speech in which one thing is understood by another. Allegory differs from the parable in its more systematic presentation of the different features of the idea which it illustrates, as well as in its contents which are concerned with the exposition of theoretical truths rather than practical exhortation.
- The School of Alexandria adopted the allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scripture, believing that it hides the truth and at the same time reveals it. It hides the truth from the ignorant, whose eyes are blinded by sin and pride, hence they are prevented from the knowledge of the

truth. At the same time, it always reveals what is new to the renewed eyes of believers.

- “who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, “See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.” (Hebrews 8:5)
- “For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;” (Hebrews 9:24)
- St. Augustine reminds us: “The New Testament is in the Old Testament Concealed, the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed.”

+ Examples of Interpretations

Consider choosing an example from the Old Testament (manna from heaven, burning bush, the ark of Noah, the rod of Aaron, etc.) that carries both a literal and revelatory meaning and having the youth explain each.

- The Sacrifices as an example, People who lived in that time period understood them literally. But those sacrifices also had typological significance, pointing to Christ. You may go through how it is interpreted.
- Noah's ark (Genesis 6:13-22)
 - Literal – The ark protected Noah and his family from the flood/ The ark was the only way to escape the flood
 - Revelatory - Jesus protects us from judgment and once we enter in Him, we will be saved from the wrath of God and receive life/ Jesus is the only way to salvation
- Manna from heaven (Exodus 16:4)
 - Literal - God delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. He provided for their food and gave them manna, a kind of sweet bread
 - Revelatory - Jesus likened himself to manna and declared that He was the true bread that came from Heaven (John 6:32-33), and He is infinitely higher than his type.
 - Unlike manna, which could only satisfy the Israelites physical needs temporarily, Jesus is the bread of life that will meet our spiritual needs eternally (John 6:35)
- Aaron's Rod
 - Literal - the rod of Aaron was used to perform many miracles in Egypt, the snake, turning water to blood, summoning the frogs and gnats
 - Revelatory - the cross of Jesus is the fulfillment of Aaron's rod, Aaron's rod is prophetic of the coming of Jesus.

+ The psalmody is a very rich treasure trove of such meaning.

Consider having the youth look through the psalmody in small groups and then coming back together to discuss at least one example each. Direct them mainly to the theotokia's.

- The different revelations made in the Midnight Praises Sunday Theotokia such as the Rod of Aaron, The Ark, The Burning Bush, etc. can be discussed. These were foreshadowing what would come in the New Testament.
- Many of us can take things for granted that become part of our routine. How many times have we sung these praises and yet have missed the intended literal and revelatory meaning they call attention to? Let us dwell on that deeper meaning.
- Put yourself in the shoes of the Hebrew people starving to death in the desert, when they first see the manna from heaven, How thankful and joyous they were to receive salvation in their most desperate time of need.
- We need the Lord Jesus Christ's salvation more than the Hebrews needed the manna from heaven, yet now that we have it, how many of us actually cherish, remain thankful and celebrate this gift daily, the way the Hebrew people did the manna?

+ The church fathers clearly call out said meaning in many of their writings where they make very clear what the revelatory meaning is behind many of these Old Testament stories.

Consider using this opportunity to share a brief summary of the background of each church father you decide to quote.

- This “wood,” again, Isaac the son of Abraham personally carried for his own sacrifice, when God had enjoined that he should be made a victim to Himself. But, because these had been mysteries which were being kept for perfect fulfillment in the times of Christ, Isaac, on the one hand, with his “wood,” was reserved, the ram being offered which was caught by the horns in the bramble. Christ, on the other hand, in His times, carried His “wood” on His own shoulders, adhering to the horns of the cross, with a thorny crown encircling His head. For Him it behoved to be made a sacrifice on behalf of all Gentiles, who “was led as a sheep for a victim, and, like a lamb voiceless before his shearer, so opened not His mouth” (for He, when Pilate interrogated Him, spake nothing for “in humility His judgment was taken away. – Tertullian (155 - 220 AD) was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage.

- 
- Aaron's rod, which blossomed, declared him to be the high priest. Isaiah prophesied that a rod would come forth from the root of Jesse, [and this was] Christ. And David says that the righteous man is 'like the tree that is planted by the channels of waters, which should yield its fruit in its season, and whose leaf should not fade.' Again, the righteous is said to flourish like the palm-tree. God appeared from a tree to Abraham, as it is written, near the oak in Mamre. The people found seventy willows and twelve springs after crossing the Jordan. David affirms that God comforted him with a rod and staff. Elisha, by casting a stick into the river Jordan, recovered the iron part of the axe with which the sons of the prophets had gone to cut down trees to build the house in which they wished to read and study the law and commandments of God; even as our Christ, by being crucified on the tree, and by purifying [us] with water, has redeemed us, though plunged in the direst offences which we have committed, and has made [us] a house of prayer and adoration. Moreover, it was a rod that pointed out Judah to be the father of Tamar's sons by a great mystery. - Justin Martyr (100 - 165 AD) was an early Christian apologist, philosopher and martyr

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.2: Mankind before the Flood

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

Identifying, through scripture, the dangers of environment without God and how it leads to wickedness

Application

Do you have surroundings that may not be fitting for the presence of God? If so, can you avoid them? Speak to your Father of Confession about those details.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Genesis I-II](#)



Liturgy: [Agios, Agios, Agios,](#)



Patristic: [Homilies, Volume I \(I-59 on the Psalms\) - The Fathers of the Church: Volume 48](#)



Story: Creation, The Fall, Noah & the Flood and The tower of Babel



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The Creation & Pre-Fall; Reliance on God

Consider having the youth give examples of biblical men and women who either chose to rely on God or their own abilities and how things turned out for each.

- In the Creation, each day was created good (Gen I). God blesses them (1:28)
- During the Creation, each day's work was created good by God (Gen I). Goodness was all that God created in Eden.
- Yet, God gave man a choice. God gifted them with Freedom.
- The first option was to choose to rely on Him and Him alone, "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed ... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)
- The other option was for man to reject God, His commandments and His loving parenthood by choosing to rely on oneself through eating from the tree of Knowledge and pridefully (foolishly) aspiring to be like God.

+ The Fall; The Natural tendency to be addicted to sin to the point of being blinded of an upcoming utter destruction.

- Adam and Eve fell prey to their human weakness and chose to disobey God and rely on their own abilities and understandings.
- But with freedom came the fall of Adam and Eve, and ultimately the fall of everyone afterwards. Sin and evil intensified as people continuously chose to live without God
- This is not an event that happened thousands of years ago. Rather every single day we choose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and rely on our own misguided wants, desires, weaknesses and understanding rather than obeying God and choosing to rely on Him and what He sees fit for us.
- Cain kills his brother that leads to more violence and wickedness (Gen 4). As his lineage grew, wickedness reigned and Lamech song (Gen 4:23-24) reflects this wickedness. "Then Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'" (Genesis 4:23-24)
- This wickedness grows as people care more for satisfying their fleshly desires (Gen 6:1-5) and for which came forth the flood & the Ark.
- All are capable of wickedness and sin and all are just as capable of selfless love and accomplishing the will of God.
- The choices we make in our everyday lives determine if we are following in the obedient steps of Noah or in the sinful steps of Cain



+ The Flood; God desire to renew and perfect man

- After the flood, mankind again grew away from God and began trying to build the tower of Babel as a means to make a name for themselves (Gen 11). So God confuses their speech in order to reunite man to God. God never abandons us, and though God at times seems strict, the goal is always to reunite man with Himself as this truly is what leads to true joyful life.
- We pray "You have not abandoned us to end" in the Liturgy of St. Basil, as he continuously seeks us, despite our mistakes, even to the point of being incarnate in person. Therefore, God confuses their speech in order to give them a chance to realize their mistake and reunite with Him.
- "Just as when holy men live together, it is a great grace and blessing; so, likewise, that congregation is the worst kind when sinners live together. The more sinners there are at one time, the worse they are. Indeed, when the tower was being built up against God, those who were building it were disbanded for their own welfare. The conspiracy was evil; the dispersion was of true benefit even to those who were dispersed" - St. Jerome on the Tower of Babel
- Had man been allowed to continue their folly unchecked, wickedness would have had no bounds and no limit. Therefore, even though it created much confusion, disappointment and anxiety, the actions God taken at the tower of Babel was ultimately in man's best interest and originated from God's unceasing mercy and love rather than from anger or malice.
- How often do we perceive events in our lives as negative and hurtful, when we come to find out much later in our lives that they were truly for our benefit and spiritual growth in the same way a loving Father gently and with pure love, corrects his young and immature children?
- God never abandons us, and though God at times seems strict, the goal is always to reunite man with Himself as this truly is what leads to a genuine joyful life. We pray "You have not abandoned us to end", as He continuously seeks us, despite our mistakes, even to the point of being incarnate in person and coming to both save and serve His creation through an ultimate example of humility "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." - John 13:13-15

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.3: The time of the Patriarchs

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

How the patriarch exemplifies the benefits of not always doing what seems ideal in our eyes, but rather to listen to God and have faith and trust that He will be with us.

Application

Ask your spiritual guide for a practice that will help you follow God, even when we do not fully understand or if it's difficult.

Use the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or any of the Patriarchs to be an example in your life.

References and Resources



Scripture: Genesis 12,17, 22 , 26-27; (Hebrews 17:20??)



Liturgy: [Tenoweh Ensok/Midnight Praises](#)



Patristics: [St. Ambrose](#)



Story: Brief overview of the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob



Other: [Abraham Isaac and Jacob](#), [HG Bishop Youssef](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Definition:

- The patriarchs are Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob, also named Israel, the ancestor of the Israelites.
- These three figures are referred to collectively as the patriarchs, and the period in which they lived is known as the patriarchal age.
- Resembled in their Obedience & Submission who all share covenant with God.

+ Abraham's Life:

- As Abram (later, Abraham) was instructed by God to leave his own relatives and country to go to one which the Lord would lead him, the Lord gave him some amazing promises: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing." (Gen 12:2).
- God made a covenant with him, promising that Abraham would be "the father of many nations" (Genesis 17:4)
- In fact, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude."
- Living in Ur (an idolatrous area) he went out not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).
- Abraham follows God towards the land of Canaan but unsure on how he will bear a nation under him when Sarah is barren. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Hebrews 11:8-10)
- The promise is then fulfilled (Gen 17:19) only to find God asking him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.
- His faith is tested, He never wavered in following God, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Heb 11:17-19)

+ Abraham's Conflict Resolution:

- Abram unselfishly offered Lot his choice of the land for his livestock, "So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:8-9).
- A lesson for us all: Abraham took a very different path in life than his family and the pagan society he was brought up in. Yet, every step of his life was filled with the intention of bettering the world and bringing humanity closer to truth, to justice, and to God.
- Abram was not only to receive blessing, but to be a blessing.



- “For Abraham was the first who deserved the witness of faith; ‘He believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ It behoved therefore that he should be set forth as the first in the line of descent, who was the first to deserve the promise of the restoration of the Church, ‘In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’ And it is again brought to a period in David, for that Jesus should be called his Son; hence to him is preserved the privilege, that from him should come the beginning of the Lord’s genealogy.” St. Ambrose

+ Isaac’s resemblance to his father, in obedience, submission and peacemaking.

- Faith and obedience: Isaac’s life was a gift from God. Isaac’s faith and obedience when Abraham bound him as a sacrifice is exemplary, for he must have truly believed what his father had told him, “And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together.” (Genesis 22:8).
- God expects us to surrender our life to Him without holding anything back. We must present our lives as a living sacrifice to him, a sacrifice that is holy and acceptable. Throughout most of his life, Isaac followed in Abraham’s footsteps.
- He gets a similar call and promise. God reaffirms the same covenant with Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 21:12; 26:3-4)
- In the midst of a famine (Gen. 26), God tells him not to go to Egypt (which was a land of providence) and He will bless him.
- Similarly to Abraham, he was a peacemaker: He and his servant found water, “the herdsman of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen” and unjustly took possession of the well. Instead of fighting over the well, Isaac moved from one place to another. This incident happened more than once. We can see that Isaac preferred peace rather than being right.
- Yes, there are times when we should fight for our right but Isaac recognized that vengeance belongs to God and He shall repay (Romans 12:19). Isaac surrendered his problem to God and let Him handle it.
- Prayers: Isaac’s wife is barren. However, Isaac and Rebekah did not put the matter on their hands. They have waited on the Lord for about 20 years. Isaac fervently pleaded to God and “the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived.” (Genesis 25:21) and he had twin children, namely Esau and Jacob.
- Submitting to God’s will: When the time comes to give the blessing to Esau, Isaac was deceived to bless Jacob instead. When Isaac realized that he blessed the wrong person, he “trembled exceedingly” and wept (Genesis 27:33, 38). However, he recognized that it was really the will of God and totally submitted to it.
- Like Isaac, we might have our own plans and wants in our lives. However, we must align our will to God’s will if we really want to live a life pleasing to Him.

+ Jacob:

- One of the most compelling aspects of the Bible is how God is constantly working through imperfect people to do unbelievable things.
- Jacob, whose very name suggests “deceiver,” is renamed by God as “Israel” -- “one who has struggled with God.” And an entire nation is named after this patriarch -- the nation of Israel. He has moments of strong faith as well as of fear.
- God reaffirms the same covenant with Jacob. (Genesis 28:14-15)
- From a young age, Jacob sought the promise of God. At first, he tried to buy it (Gen 25:31) and then tricked Isaac in blessing Him (Gen 27)
- Jacob practiced deceit and manipulation to reach his desired ends.
- Tithing: Jacob agreed to tithe ten percent of everything he got (Genesis 28:22) – At this point, tithing wasn’t yet commanded. Jacob was willing to do it completely voluntarily. Jacob was willing to act on his faith in God by returning one tenth of all that he got.
- Submission in Faith: Having received God’s promises in a dream, Jacob pledged his loyalty to God (Genesis 28:18) and afterward lived a very changed life. He recognized his weaknesses and placed his faith in God to protect him. (Genesis 32:9-12). We see in verse 10 that Jacob admits he is unworthy of all that God had done for him. Although he often relied on himself in the past, he realized that the good things in his life were solely because of God’s blessing and God’s faithfulness to keep His promise.
- As we read in Hebrews 11:21, “By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

+ The Comfort and Example of the Patriarchs

- The Litany of the Departed speaks of the comfort of the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as after all the wickedness that came from the fall to the tower of Babel, the patriarchs, starting with Abraham, led by example their descendants which eventually became the nation of God as God promised Abraham.
- God then refers to Himself as the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob (Ex. 3:6, Num 32:11, 2 Kings 13:23, Acts 3:13)
- We thus pray in the Midnight praises that God keep His covenant with us and bless and protect us as he has blessed and protected them.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.4: The exile into Egypt

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

How to deal with mistreatment

Application

Offer gifts, love and forgiveness to those who mistreat you.

References and Resources



Scripture: Gen 46-50; Exodus 1



Liturgy: [Fraction to the Son: O You, The Being](#)



Patristics: [Eusebius](#)



Story: St. Joseph the Righteous



Other: [Timeless Truth in Truthless Times, George Basilios](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Mistreatment

"If someone is treating me badly, I should keep dealing with him and bear with him and his actions."

Consider beginning the lesson with debating the positive and negative aspects of the aforementioned quote.

+ Joseph and his brothers:

Consider asking the youth the main elements of the story of Joseph.

- How did Joseph's brothers treat him?
- How do you think that made Joseph feel?
- What are some of the reactions we could have expected from Joseph after what his brothers did to him?
- In a moment, Joseph's life was changed from being the beloved son, with promise, to a slave in the unknown land of Egypt
- Due to the false accusation of Potiphar's wife to her husband, because Joseph would not sleep with her, Joseph was cast into prison. Though, prior to being cast in prison, he had become a prominent person in Potiphar's house. The struggles could have easily been blame shifted to his brothers and hold on to a greater grudge.
- However, Joseph told his brothers when he met them many years later that "...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50:20)
- The mistreatment and humiliation from his brothers, along with the presence of God in Joseph's life (Genesis 39:2), resulted in the success of Joseph's reign over Egypt.
- To add onto this, George Basilios in Timeless Truth in Truthless Times mentions that "This indicates that God had certain plans and intentions related to Joseph's slavery, even though his brothers were fully accountable" (p. 55), showing that God doesn't just use our mistreatment for good, but he meant it for good.
- If you are in Joseph's place, will you forgive his brothers?

+ Exodus I: A forgotten People

- In Exodus I, we learn about Joseph's death and what happened next. The Egyptian leaders forgot all that Joseph had done for them, and made the Hebrew people slaves because they feared them.
- The lives of the Israelite people became bitter and hard.
- The central theme of the first half of the book of Exodus is the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and their miraculous salvation by the hand of God.



- It is through the Exodus that the people of Israel establish themselves both as an independent nation and as the nation of God.
- Why was it necessary for the children of Israel to go into exile in Egypt and suffer oppression and slavery?
- What prevented their immediate inheritance of the land of Israel, as promised by God to them?
- God has a plan in spite of harsh circumstances and is always with us.
- While all these events are happening, Moses is growing from within Pharaoh's house, a seed clearly planted by God.

+ How do we face mistreatment?

- How do you feel when you are mistreated by others?
- When others treat us poorly or unfairly we have 2 options: how we should react versus how we actually react. How do we differentiate or pick the right one? What is one benefit we get from treating others better than the way they treat us?
- Injustice is all around us but if we keep our eyes on the goodness of God we will be able to find positivity in everything around us, regardless of how bleak our surroundings are.
- It is clear that the Lord Christ, to Him is due all glory, taught us in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount that we are blessed when we are persecuted or mistreated. The Lord promised that we are blessed, twice, and that our reward is great in heaven: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).
- What a beautiful prayer by St. Eusebius, "May I always maintain control of my emotions. May I habituate myself to be gentle, and never angry with others because of circumstances. May I never discuss the wicked or what they have done, but know good people and follow in their footsteps. [Prayer to practice the Golden Rule]"
- He also says, "May I gain no victory that harms me or my opponent. May I reconcile friends who are mad at each other. May I, insofar as I can, give all necessary help to my friends and to all who are in need. May I never fail a friend in trouble." Prayer on the Golden Rule"
- We ought to learn from our Lord Jesus Christ who was unjustly crucified. We pray in the Fraction to the Son: "O You, The Being, "who, according to His own will, was pleased to suffer on behalf of sinners, of whom I am chief."

+ As a review, consider quickly revisiting the timeline from the creation and placing them geographically and showing Abraham and descendants were in Canaan, and then went to Egypt.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.5: The Journey to Canaan

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

To discern God's will and plan which can be seen through the journey to Canaan and to trust that God's way is better than our way, even if we are impatient or do not understand.

Application

The Israelites had to live through slavery for hundreds of years and travel through the wilderness for decades before they got to the land that God promised them. We should trust that God has an ultimate plan for us and that we should be patient, because what God has in store for us is much greater than what we can imagine.

Be patient and pray so that God can reveal His will for us. Trust in God and His plan for us.

References and Resources



Scripture: Ex 11-13:16; Num 26-36; Josh 10-11; Judges 1-3:6



Liturgy: [litany of the Travelers](#)



Patristics: [St. Basil the Great](#)



Story: Moses the Archprophet



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ God calls a man of shortcomings

Consider choosing an example from the Old Testament where the person that God chose was inferior or incapable and yet they were able to carry out what God asked them to do through the grace of God.

- The Burning Bush (Ex 3): God calls Moses, and though Moses feels unworthy God equips him with everything he needed (Aaron to speak for him,
- David and Goliath (1st Samuel 17): Though David was still a physically weaker child when compared to Goliath, God slayed Goliath through the hands of David.
- Your shortcomings do not matter, your weaknesses do not matter, your disabilities do not matter, for when God has chosen you to carry out His will, He will always grant you everything you need to do that which He requires.

+ A Blessing in disguise

Consider choosing an example from the Old Testament where that which is considered "bad" was used for "good" by God

- The Ten plagues (Ex 11-12:31): God's will for His people is established through the ten plagues. *You may attempt to see which plagues they remember.*
- The Exodus from Egypt (Ex 12:31-13:16; Numbers 1-36):
 - The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The book of Numbers tells that story.
 - The Book of Numbers follows Moses and Israel's journey from the foot of Mount Sinai (which is where the Book of Leviticus ends) to the edge of the promised land of Canaan. If this were a regular road trip of the time, the journey would only take about two weeks.
- Sometimes what appears to be destructive and hurtful is actually God working on our behalf for our best interests

+ Why does the journey to Canaan take 40 years?

Consider showing a visual representation of the journey to Canaan

- When the people get about halfway there, Moses sends a few spies into the land to scout it out for the upcoming invasion. Most of the spies come back in a panic, claiming that the Canaanites are far too powerful for Israel to overcome. This leads to a revolt, with the people refusing to take the land. God gives them their wish, decreeing that the whole generation will die in the wilderness, and the land will be taken by their children.
- Their action displeased God, "Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?" (Numbers 14:11)



- The outcome was that the Hebrew people spent 40 years lost in the wilderness, doubting God. When the next generation finally learned to depend on God, God allowed Joshua to deliver them to the promised land.
 - The less we involve God in our lives, the less we are able to benefit from His Grace.
 - However, God never breaks a promise. Forty years before this time God had told the children of Israel, "I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord." (Exodus 6:7-8)
- + Most believers find themselves somewhere in between Sinai (having made sacred covenants with the Lord) and crossing the river Jordan (entering the true promised land)
- The journey in the wilderness represents our own wilderness years with God. The wilderness years are the grounds in which God sifts and refines our spirits and hearts in order to mirror Him
 - There will be times in our life when everything seems like it is not going our way and what we do need to do is almost impossible. That's often what the wilderness season feels like.
 - The Israelites felt the same way. They were set free from the Pharaoh, but they were far from being free from the sins of complaining, lack of trust in God, and stubborn hearts. Their eleven-day journey to the Promised Land turned into 40 years.
 - The wilderness is defined as an uncultivated, uninhabited, and inhospitable region. Do any of these things sound comfortable? They're not supposed to be, it's not a comfortable place because it's temporary.
 - The purpose of this time in the wilderness is to free us from sin and bondage so we can be transformed into the person God has called us to be. In those moments God will intervene and do what is best for us as long as we do His will
 - We see this when God causes the impenetrable Jericho to fall to the Hebrews. (Joshua 10-11) and how God's will is worked through all of His people.
 - As St. Basil the Great says, "Do not say, "this happened by chance, while this came to be of itself." In all that exists there is nothing disorderly, nothing indefinite, nothing without purpose, nothing by chance ... How many hairs are on your head? God will not forget one of them. Do you see how nothing, even the smallest thing, escapes the gaze of God?"
- + How do you feel if you are in the wilderness by yourself (without God)?
- Consider having them meditate on the below verse and ask them what it means to them. Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*
- Lost, abandon, forsaken, vanished, no way out, dry, empty, lonely, stranger
 - Another side of wilderness: How do you feel if you are in the wilderness by yourself (with God)?
 - Growth and retreat; Encounter God personally; Monks and nuns; Nourishment; Spiritual life
 - As we pray in the litany of travelers, "And for us too, O Lord, keep our sojourn in this life without harm, without storm, and undisturbed to the end.
- + Preserved through a life of dedication and consecration
- Israel and the Remaining Canaanites (Judges 1-3:6)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.6: The period of the Judges

Building Block 2: The
OT Timeline I -
Discerning the
Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

Contemplate on how you can keep your life from following the downward path of Israel seen in the book of Judges.

Application

Christianity does not mean that we are immune from falling away from God, Israel (God's people), put themselves in a downward spiral away from God.

We must pray to God and ask for His forgiveness, repent our ways so that even when we fall, we can find our way back to Him.

References and Resources



Scripture: Judges 3-21



Liturgy: [Thanksgiving Prayer](#)



Patristics: [St. Anthony the Great](#)



Story: Deborah the Judge



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Who are the Judges?

- After Joshua died, Judges guided the Israelites. A Judge was someone with wisdom, courage and guided by the spirit of God to lead and judge among the Jews at that time.
- The book of Judges describes a period in the life of the nation of Israel between the prophetic leadership of Moses and Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy and kingship in Israel. The nature of this time period is described on four different occasions in the book, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)

+ The Cycle of Rebellion: Overview of the Judges (both good and bad)

You may want focus on the role of the judge and go more in detail on a particular character on how they fulfilled this example. Consider discussing the implications of straying away from God (as seen in Judges) and how God is always waiting for us to return to Him.

- The Book of Judges how our Lord wanted to test Israel and how the Israelites were on the right and wrong paths spiritually several times.
- After getting into the Promised Land the Israelites forgot the great things that God did for them. They started worshiping idols and statues.
- God sends a Judge to deliver them → Israel Rebels → God disciplines them → Israel Repents → The cycle restarts
- Judges 3:4 "And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses." ... Judges 3:7 "So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God..."
- The book of Judges this exact scenario is referenced 7 times. 7 times the people of Israel were given the opportunity to stay on the right path spiritually and 7 times they disobeyed.
- St. Paul tells us in Hebrews 11:32-34, "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

	Passage	Overview
Othniel	Judges 3:9-11	Frees Israel from Mesopotamia, land rests for 40 years
Ehud	Judges 3:15-30	Frees Israel from Moab, land rests for 80 years



Shamgar	Judges 3:31	Frees Israel from Philistines killing 600 men.
Deborah & Barak, the commander	Judges 4-5	Story of the victory of the Israelites over Canaan under the charismatic leadership of Deborah and the military leadership of Barak, her commander. - The story of Deborah in the Bible shows us that the Lord calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things that can only be accomplished through the Spirit - Deborah was a woman of great wisdom, revelation, and discernment. She also had a prophetic gift, including knowing the times and seasons of the Lord. She clearly heard the voice of the Lord. - She was a worshiping warrior. She found encouragement and strength in worship to be obedient to everything the Lord was asking her to do.
Gideon	Judges 6-8	Frees Israel from the Midianites. - The oppressors of Israel during the time of Gideon were the camel-borne raiders from Midian, roving bands that pillaged the farms and unfortified villages for seven years. A prophet appeared among the Israelites and denounced them for their apostasy, after which, according to the account, an angel of Yahweh visited and then commissioned Gideon, a member of the tribe of Manasseh, to lead the Israelites against the enemies from the Transjordan.
Abimelech & Micah's Idol	Judges 9: 17-21	These judges abused their authority and led the people away from God
Tola & Jair	Judges 10:1-5	Tola judges for 23 years and Jair for 22 years.
Jephthah	Judges 10:6-12:7	Led the Hebrews to victory by abiding by God's law.
Samson	Judges 13-16	Frees Israel from the Philistines - Walked in God's path only to stray and finally redeem himself at the end of his life.
Elon, Ibzan, Abdon	Judges 12:8-15	Nothing is mentioned but their names. Though nothing is notably written God acknowledges the work of anyone who attempt to turn ways to Him.

+ Keeping our lives in the right Path; Seeking Proper Pleasure

Contrast the Israelites being surrounded with Canaanite culture with our culture's desire to seek after pleasure: "If it makes you happy, do it". "Avoid pain and suffering". You may contrast this with Caterpillar who at times blends in, at times plays dead, at times is tough and other has a different appearance.

- Thanksgiving prayer is an essential part of all our prayers. As we pray in the liturgy, "Therefore, we ask and entreat Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind, grant us to complete this holy day and all the days of our life *in all peace with Your fear*. All envy, all temptation, all the work of Satan, the counsel of wicked men and the rising up of enemies, hidden and manifest, take them away from us."
- Abba Anthony said, "Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." He even added, "Without temptations no-one can be saved."
- 3 types of Pleasure: Spiritual Pleasure (Peace, Joy, Unity), Sinful Pleasure (Fake, Temporary, Quick), Natural Pleasure (Eating, Resting, Swimming)
- Crucial is the self-knowledge of one's own weakness, not as a means to destroy one's self-esteem but rather to enforce it and by acknowledging the work of Grace in them.
- Know that He disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5-11). Remember, trust, and obey. Return through repentance & Confession (Lk 15:10, Jn 5:37).

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 2.7: Israel asks for a King & Review of The Timeline of the Pre-Kingdom

Building Block 2: The OT Timeline I - Discerning the Pre-Kingdom Era



Objective

To understand the dangers of following the worldly flow and a refresh of the building block.

Application

Today, we face the same decision the Israelites did. Who (or what) do we want as our king (master)?

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Samuel 1-10](#)



Liturgy: [Psalm 149/Vespers Praises](#)



Patristics: St. Ephraim the Syrian, Counsels to a Novice Monk;- Saint Augustine of Hippo



Story: King Samuel



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Review the timeline presented in the building block

Time Period	Review
Mankind before the Flood	Q. What are the main events prior to the Flood? A. The Creation, The Fall, Murder of Cain & Abel, The Tower of Babel, Noah builds the Ark
The Patriarchs	Q. Who are the Patriarchs? A. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Q. What did they have in common A. The Covenant of God, Submission, Obedience, etc...
The Exile into Egypt	Q. What led to the people of Israel to be held Captive in Egypt? A. After Joseph helps Pharaoh through the famine, the Israelites migrate to Egypt. After years in Egypt, Pharaoh decides to enslave them. Q. What are examples of God prevailing when mistreated during this time period? A. Joseph is continuously mistreated, sees the path is meant for good by God. A. Moses grows up in Pharaoh's house while the Israelites are enslaved.
The Journey to Canaan	Q. Why does the Journey take 40 years? A. When the people get about halfway there, Moses sends a few spies into the land to scout it out for the upcoming invasion. Most of the spies come back in a panic, claiming that the Canaanites are far too powerful for Israel to overcome. This leads to a revolt, with the people refusing to take the land. God gives them their wish, decreeing that the whole generation will die in the wilderness, and the land will be taken by their children. Their action displeased God, " Then the Lord said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? " (Numbers 14:11) The outcome was that the Hebrew people spent 40 years lost in the wilderness, doubting God. When the next generation finally learned to depend on God, God allowed Joshua to deliver them to the promised land.
The Period of the Judges	Q. What was the purpose of Judges A. To keep the Israelites on the right path

Q. Name as many judges as possible

A. Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Samson, Elon, Ibzan, Abdon

+ Israel wants a worldly leader

- In I Samuel 8:5 the Israelites ask Samuel to appoint a king, saying, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.”
- Was this wrong? The following verses make clear that it was. Samuel was displeased and prayed to the Lord concerning the matter.
- God answered, “And the Lord said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.” (I Samuel 8:7-8).
- God said the Israelites’ request was a rejection of Him, that they had forsaken Him and were serving other gods.
- The Lord was to be the ruler of Israel. God led the people through Moses and Aaron, and then through priests and judges raised up to govern the people. In Samuel’s time, the people began to worry about who the next leader would be, since Samuel’s sons did not follow the Lord. Their request for a king was a rejection of God’s way of leadership over them.
- God had created Israel as a unique people. He was their leader. When the Israelites wanted a king like other nations had, they were rejecting their unique, set-apart position as God’s people in order to be like “all the other nations.”
- The Israelites rejected God’s will and asked for an earthly king, (their will).
- “In the measure to which a man cuts off and humbles his own will, he proceeds toward success. But insofar as he stubbornly guards his own will, so much does he bring harm to himself.” - St. Ephraim the Syrian, Counsels to a Novice Monk
- “Is any man skillful enough to have fashioned himself?” - Saint Augustine of Hippo

+ Saul the first king

- God, in spite of their rebellion, gave them what they had asked for and rewarded them with Saul as a king. Why was Saul the chosen one?
- In chapter 9 Saul is described as being a handsome, younger man and had the image of a king with his physical appearance. He was taller than everyone surrounding him from the neck up and had broad shoulders. Saul was chosen by God himself to be the first king of Israel. Saul defeated many of the enemies of his country, including the Ammonites, Philistines, Moabites, and Amalekites. He united the scattered tribes, giving them greater strength. He reigned for 42 years.
- God wants us to depend on Him. When we do not and rely instead on our own strength and wisdom, we open ourselves to difficulties
- Saul enjoyed his popularity with the people, forgetting he had been appointed king by God.
- Saul’s first allegiance was to God, as is ours. He, however, lost this quest. We should not forget, as Saul did, that we are all servants of God first. We ought to glorify God as we pray in Psalm 149 of Vespers Praises, “Let Israel rejoice in their maker: Alleluia. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.

+ Compare this to our worldly requests

- Today, we face the same decision the Israelites did. Who (or what) do we want as our king (master)?
- The problem was with the motive of Israel’s request; examine your motive of your requests.
- The Israelites did not ask for a king that God would choose, but one that the world would choose.
- Read James 4:3, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”
- They are allowing themselves to be driven by envy and ambition. This does not reflect a trust in God to provide all they needed and much more. As a result, their lives are consumed with fights and quarrels to get what they want.
- What is the danger of shifting from independent thinking to groupthink? (If everyone else is doing it, it must be right.)



Building Block 3: Discerning the Spirit of the New Testament

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 3.I: Introduction to the Gospels

Building Block 3:
Discerning the Spirit
of The New
Testament



Objective

To understand that the four Gospels give perspectives of the same events by four different authors.

Application

Find a story that was written in at least 3 gospels and explain the differences, if any
Understand that each Gospel has a different purpose
Be confident that the Gospels contain the truth
Be encouraged to read the Gospels (and rest of the Bible)

References and Resources



Scripture: [John 21:25](#)



Liturgy: [The Litany of the Gospel](#)



Patristics: Irenaeus, (130-202), (Adv. H. 3:1).



Story: Resurrection eve, reading all four gospels as a greater testimony of this great feast ([Matt 28](#), [Mark 16](#), [Luke 24](#), [John 20](#))



Other: [Introduction to the Gospels Course](#), Fr. Daniel Azer; [SUS Diocese](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Introduction:

- The gospels tell of the life and teaching of Jesus, but none of them is a biography in the classical sense of the word.
- The gospels were not written merely to tell the story of Jesus.
- They were written by the disciples of Christ, who were filled with the Holy Spirit after the Lord's resurrection, to bear witness to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the promised Messiah-Christ of Israel and the Savior of the world.

+ Irony #1: Do we read the Gospel four times on Palm Sunday?

Yes! We read from Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19, and John 12, all of which attest to the same event from a slightly different perspective.

- Only Matthew and John were among the 12 apostles. Luke was formerly a Gentile until he converted and joined the 70 apostles. Mark was among the 70 too!
- All four were moved by the Holy Spirit and decided to record the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, though keep in mind that not all of them were among the 12 apostles. Hence, though they all may say the truth, they have not witnessed the same events together and as a result, will describe God from different angles/perspectives.
- Our church considers the four records written by those evangelists as the main sources that document the life of Jesus Christ. As a result, we venerate them and read them every liturgy. Together, all four books earned the name "Evangelion" - or "good news" of the journey of salvation that Jesus Christ endured for us.
 - St. Irenaeus described it best when he wrote, "The Church, spread all over the world, has in the gospels four pillars and four winds blowing wherever people live," through the Gospel reading section of the liturgy held in every church around the world.

+ Irony #2: 4 Authors talking to different audiences

Can the four Gospels preach one truth despite being written by evangelists with different target audiences?

- Since all four evangelists were inspired by the Holy Spirit in every word they wrote, then of course all four Gospels preach the same truth! They never conflict! Proving all the more the credibility of the incarnation.
- St. Irenaeus would go on to say that "these four gospels are in actual fact one single gospel, a fourfold gospel inspired by the one Spirit, a gospel which has four aspects representing the work of the Son of God."



+ To the Jews: The Prophecies are fulfilled!

- Matthew and John witnessed the ministry of Christ most closely, since they were among the 12 apostles. However, after Pentecost, Matthew preached amongst a predominantly Jewish area. *What do Jews today doubt the most? They doubt the incarnation of the Messiah.* The Jews in the time of St. Matthew were not sure if “[He] was the Coming One, or if [they] should look for another” (Matthew 11:3).
 - Thereby, tailoring to their doubts and concerns, Matthew focused on Jesus Christ the Incarnate fulfilling all the prophecies of the Old Testament through His journey. He referenced the Old Testament almost 129 times; and for that reason, his Gospel was placed first out of the four Gospels. *As you see, the Gospels are not placed haphazardly in order of writing date!*

+ To the Gentiles: He is your God too!

- Mark was not even one of the 12, but he followed Christ closely enough that he desired to write of the great things he witnessed. As one of the 70 disciples, he traveled around to spread Christianity further abroad. St. Mark traveled to Rome! Rome was full of Gentiles at the time. Those Gentiles worshiped pagan gods and followed rituals totally different from those preached by Jesus Christ. *Do you think they will take the whole narrative of Christ's life, from birth to ascension, easily?*
 - Mark knew how difficult it was to preach a totally different dogma to pagan worshippers, particularly at the risk of persecution. As a result, he tailored his Gospel to the Gentiles by focusing on Christ's doings, not his birth or young age. St. Mark focused on deeds, not prophecies. Judging on His deeds, Christ conquered Satan by performing wondrous works, and those works are exactly what a Gentile needs to hear in order to understand and convert over from Paganism with solid, fearless faith.

+ From a Gentile: He is your Lamb!

- Luke was not one of the 12 either, but to our greater astonishment, he was not even a Jew! How could the church trust the credibility or reliability of a non-Jewish writer? Contrary to our expectations, he was more than reliable in his ardent faith to convert to Christianity and preach to the Greeks. Just like the Romans, the Greeks were also Gentiles at the time. But Luke did not copy the gospel of St. Mark off the bat, but rather refined it. Since he himself was a former Gentile, we trust he knows best how to appeal to the Gentiles.
 - With that in mind, Luke chose to focus on the role of Jesus Christ as the sacrificial lamb of God. It takes a very big, selfless heart to commit oneself to the cross on behalf of all mankind, and Jesus did just that through His loving kindness. Therefore, we call the subject of Luke's book the Theophilus - the "love of God."

+ From the Beloved: Know Him in Truth!

- John, like Matthew, was one of the 12 apostles, particularly that one apostle who always rests his head on Christ's chest in the icon of the last supper. St. John the Beloved wrote the book in a very different way, focusing more on the meaning behind Christ's activities rather than just narrating His life and works (more of an evangelistic way, not a historic way). And that's why we call the first three gospels “synoptic gospels” as they “present the same view,” while St. John's is non-synoptic. St. John wrote the Gospel much later in time, around 85 AD, by which the term “Christians” started to gain meaning. That's why he focused more so on the meaning of Christ's miracles and works, instead of just narrating his history and life on earth. The purpose of St. John's Gospel is to confirm the believers in their faith that Jesus is the Christ Son of God, and through Him we will have life. Origen says: [None of the evangelists announced the Lord's divinity as clearly as St. John. In every chapter, Christ's deity is unveiled

+ Irony #3: 4 Gospels, each scrutinizing a different part of Christ's life

Coming from different perspectives and angles, how do the four Gospels build one, true image of Jesus Christ?

- After scrutinizing the main focus of each gospel so far, St. Irenaeus summarized the overall image as follows:
 - Matthew focused on Christ as a man - symbolizing the coming of the Lord in human nature from St. Mary
 - Mark focused on Christ as a lion - symbolizing our mighty Lord as masterly and kingly in His priesthood (His works/doings)
 - Luke focused on Christ as an ox - symbolizing Jesus Christ as the sacrificial lamb, the perfect sacrifice
 - John focused on Christ as an eagle - symbolizing Christ's resurrection and ascension (deeper meaning: the Holy Spirit of God will always hover over the Church)
- Can Christ be a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle at the same time? If your answer is yes, then the four different gospels preach the same truth! Then all the aforementioned ironies have been resolved! Four different authors, four different intended audiences, but it is one Spirit that talks through it all.



+ Outcomes/Applications

- Be there four Gospels, ten Gospels, or even a million, St. John still persists on reminding us that “there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).
- Recording the life of Jesus Christ four times has led to the following outcomes:
 - Emphasize the importance of Christ’s life
 - Multiply the testimony to Christ’s life in the flesh (that is, reaffirm the evidence of the incarnation)
 - Present the different aspects of Christ’s character
 - Spread the Word of God to different classes of people

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 3.2: The 3 Missionary Journeys (Acts)

Building Block 3:
Discerning the Spirit
of The New
Testament



Objective

To understand the purpose of the 3 missionary journeys of St. Paul and what we can learn from his discernment of understanding the meaning and purpose of preaching.

Application

Paul sacrificed a lot to follow Jesus. Not only did he eventually lay down his life, but he also suffered. What is one thing you can do this week to follow his example?

References and Resources



Scripture: [Acts 12-21](#)



Liturgy: [Priest's Praxis encircle](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom on Acts](#) and also his second homily on St. Paul ([pg. 477-480](#)).



Story: [Elymas the sorcerer](#); [Altar to the unknown God](#)



Other: [Legacy Curriculum, July Week 2](#); [The Missionary Journeys, Article by LAcopts](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Saul persecuted the disciples; Paul ministered with them

Who would have thought?

- If you flip the pages of the Bible between Acts 8 and 9, you will find the plot twisting from “Saul persecutes the church” to “Saul preaches Christ.” Saul was a young Hebrew, the disciple of Gamaliel, and an ardent Pharisee. The new teachings brought in by Jesus Christ enraged him so much that he started persecuting the Jews who followed Him. He also approved of the persecution of Stephen, the deacon and first martyr.
- And just as Stephen had prayed - “Lord, do not remember this sin against them” - God called on Saul on the road to Damascus and reminded him that He is the one, true God. From now on, he would be called Paul.
- Before you explore the three trips, you may have noticed how much importance they bear in our church history through the procession; the priest goes around the whole church three times with the censer in his hands, resembling the preaching of the Word around the world through St. Paul. Note that the third time around, though, right before reading the Praxis (Acts), the priest only circles the front half of the pews! (the 2nd chorus)
 - Abouna does that because unlike St. Paul, the Lord commanded the 12 disciples to preach in Jerusalem and Judea, not outside that area.

+ 1st Missionary Trip: Elymas the Sorcerer

Consider reading Acts 13:6-12 first to pique their interest in this trip. Helpful maps can be found [here](#).

- Paul, accompanied by Baranabas and John Mark, started his first journey from Antioch to Cyprus and Lystra and proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish Synagogues.
- Among the first notable works of St. Paul was blinding Elymas the sorcerer. *How does blinding someone help preach the faith?*
 - The proconsul called Paul and asked him to explain his faith; by blinding the sorcerer, Paul asserted his firm and unfaltering pursuit of a righteous, true God. God heard Paul's request and caused the black mist to fall on the sorcerer's eyes. Despite how dark the miracle may seem, it takes such great affirmations of faith to get individuals like the proconsul to acknowledge it!
- Another notable work done on this trip was healing a crippled man in Lystra. Through the performing of miracles, Paul's teachings gained more and more credibility and attention from the crowds, shaking the pagan foundations of the empire. Paul was preaching the existence of one, true king, and the elimination of all the manifold pagan gods that existed before. How would that shake the foundations of the empire?
 - The emperor was presumed king at the time! The only principle that kept the civilians in utter obedience of the emperor is the idea of worshipping him. Preaching a different king - the Son of God - shakes the whole political order of the empire. Soon enough, many politicians heard of Paul's works and started reacting to him.

- Eventually, some Jews in Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul and exiled him from the city, mistaking him for dead. But as St. John Chrysostom reminds us, “he rose up with greater ardor and faced with new eagerness the dangers that threatened him” (2nd Homily on St. Paul, 477-480).

+ 2nd Missionary Trip: Altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”

If we were in Paul’s shoes, how would we express openness to the pagan Greeks at the sight of this altar AND try to convert them?

- Paul sailed away from Iconium for a while, this time headed for Lystra and Derbe with Silas the apostle. God continued to guide Paul in his path by sending him visions of the particular locations where people yearn to learn about God.
- In Lystra, Paul met Timothy and converted his household to the faith. Paul encouraged Timothy not to give up on his spiritual zeal just because of his young age; eventually, that relationship blossomed for 16 years, and Timothy became a companion to Paul “like no other” (1 Tim 1:2, Philippi 2:19-23).
- Paul goes to Philippi to find a woman - Lydia - yearning to hear his words about the One, true God. Her whole household chose to take up the faith, and Paul baptized them all. Contrary to ancient expectations of women, Lydia grew to become an ardent preacher and helper of St. Paul in the ministry.
- As usual, Satan does a bold comeback. In Philippi, a pagan family was making money out of their female slave’s demonic divination. St. Paul helped free her from those demons. Now that she is free again, the family has lost its business! The family riled up the city against Paul and Silas, beat them, and imprisoned them.
 - Also as usual, God helps Paul out of every conflict. By midnight, an earthquake shook the city and opened up the prison cells. At this sight, the guard of the cells tried to kill himself, thinking the prisoners had escaped, but at once Paul yelled out and reminded him that they were still there. We read in Acts 16:30-34 that he and his household believed and were baptized “And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”
- Not much later, Paul stumbled upon a group of Athenians kneeling before an altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” at Areopagus (Acts 17:23). With remarkable openness, Paul approached them and told them, “the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17: 23). Through such openness, Paul was able to remind them that “God does not dwell in temples made of human hands,” transforming Dionysius the Areopagite to a Christian believer.

+ 3rd Missionary Trip: Paul’s Final Speech

Consider reading Acts 20:18-38 first.

- The sufferings just keep getting worse from trip to trip, but so does the glory of God’s work with us. This time, as Paul visited Galatia, his clothes and aprons became sources of healing and blessing to all the sick in the city.
- Many magicians who said they can predict futures or provide healing in some way saw Paul’s work as even greater than magic, and started believing. Some others, however, like Demetrius, saw it as a loss of business fortune and decided to rile up a riot against Paul. Thankfully, some merchants helped Paul escape the riot to Macedonia.
- Alas, Paul was taken to prison in Rome for 2 years (don’t let your hopes down yet, he kept preaching from prison). Julius the centurion then delivered him to the captain of the guards, and St. Paul was beheaded at the order of Nero the emperor. Have no doubt, though, that even at the second of getting beheaded, someone else watching it converted to Christianity (the kinswoman of the emperor).

+ 3 Trips beyond what we expected

- “Each day he aimed ever higher; each day he rose up with greater ardor and faced with new eagerness the dangers that threatened him. He summed up his attitude in the words: ‘I forget what is behind me and push on to what lies ahead’” - 2nd Homily of St. John Chrysostom on the life of St. Paul.
- Not only does endless suffering awaken us from laziness and negligence, but it also reminds us to plead for God’s blessing and help in all things, so that he may be our constant companion in all of our works.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 3.3: Pauline Letters

Building Block 3:
Discerning the Spirit
of The New
Testament



Objective

To understand the purpose of Pauline Epistles, why they were written; to whom they were written, and what were the struggles St. Paul was dealing with.

Application

Create a table with the 14 letters; to whom it was written, its date and its theme.
Be encouraged to serve others (inside and outside the Church) and perhaps identify a few friends that you do not check up on regularly and call them and ask about them.

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Corinthians 9: 19-23](#)



Liturgy: [The Pauline Epistle Hymn](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom](#); [St. Augustine](#)



Story: [Servants who served with St. Paul](#)



Other: [Personality Types, by HGBY](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ His Formidable Writing Style

- Prior to reading the Pauline epistle during the Liturgy, the deacon chants, "Paul, the servant of our Lord, Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and appointed to the Gospel of God." The recurrence of this hymn every single liturgy only proves how valuable and significant the Pauline epistles are to our daily practices as believers. Contrary to other sections of the Bible, those epistles are not narratives or collections of parables.
- What are they, then? Before we explore that, the first thing that sets them apart is their formidable and unique writing style. Every epistle starts with a greeting, followed by a prayer, theoretical and doctrinal exhortations, practical applications, then finally a farewell and a benediction.

+ His Well-Rounded Exhortations

- Ecclesiastical Epistles: How are faithful believers meant to live?

Those epistles were written early on in Paul's life, on his second and third trips, meaning that they addressed the building of new churches in those areas. That early in time, Christianity was still a new term to meddle with and required much exhortations from Paul to be practiced right - hence why we call those 6 the 'major' epistles. All Pauline epistles are organized by theme in this [table](#).

1. Both Jews and Gentiles cannot be saved without believing in Jesus Christ and His Gospel; believers abide by the righteousness of God in love, selflessness, and service = Romans
- St. John Chrysostom comments on Romans Chapter 2 and says, "These things he says, with an aim at the rulers, inasmuch as that city then had the rule of the world put into its hands. He anticipated them therefore by saying, You are depriving yourself of defence, whoever you may be; for when you condemn an adulterer, and yourself commit adultery, although no man condemns you, in your judgment upon the guilty person you have also passed sentence against yourself."
2. True believers abide by the one, true Gospel, which means believing that Christ has freed them from the curse of the law through the Cross. In so doing, they relish this Christian liberty through love, generosity, and walking in the Spirit = Galatians
3. Faithful believers must remain in unity and fellowship - Koinonia - be it through marriage, through obedience to church doctrines without sectarianism, or through love to all men, making the church even more solid and without divisions = 1 Corinthians
4. Faithful believers in Corinth still resist the concept of the destruction of their old covenant; however, Paul reminds them again of the Resurrection and the new ministry that has gone out to preach this covenant, while beseeching them to reconcile too and heed the words of the apostles = 2 Corinthians

5. Believers are meant to believe that Holy life leads to eternal life, because that's exactly what the Thessalonians did at the hearing of St. Paul's words. They were not as resistant as the Corinthians were, but yearned to learn the true faith = 1 Thessalonians
6. Believers are meant to acknowledge that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will come again in the Second Coming at the end of times = 2 Thessalonians

- Prison Epistles: How is Christ made manifest in the Church?

Those epistles were written during Paul's time in prison, after completing his three trips. It makes sense, then, that as Paul feels closer to the end of his life (persecution), that he would address more important topics in a more blunt fashion. The tone of urgency lies beneath those four epistles noticeably. HG Bishop Basil uses a specific key to remind us of those 4 epistles: 3 have "ph" in them, and one does not (Colossians).

1. Christ is the head of the Church = Colossians
2. The church is the body of Christ = Ephesians (2:21-22). St. Augustine comments on Ephesians 2:3 and says, "What then is meant by this wickedness of the natural man and of those who ... "by nature" are children of wrath? Could this possibly be the nature created in Adam? That created nature was debased in him. It has run and is running its course now through everyone by nature, so that nothing frees us from condemnation except the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. "
3. The church promotes prayer, fasting, preaching, and humility; the church drives us to live in Christ = Philippians
4. The church promotes brotherhood and oneness in Christ = Philemon

- Pastoral Epistles: How are the clergy meant to live?

Those epistles were written throughout Paul's trips but to more specific audiences, narrowing down their topics. Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus, and Titus, Bishop of Crete, remained bold and courageous in the craft as Paul continued to exhort them through those letters.

1. Take heed to themselves and to the doctrine, honor church members, and guard what was committed to their trust = 1 Timothy (4:16, 5:1, 6:20)
2. Preach the Word in season and out of season, faithfully despite all sufferings, for perilous times will come = 2 Timothy
3. Guard their churches well by exhorting the old ones and the bondservants using sound doctrine, speaking evil of no one = Titus

+ Servants who helped St. Paul in his ministry:

- Read Romans 16 and discuss the names of those servants and their role in St. Paul's work and ministry.
- Phoebe, as an example, was part of a larger cohort of women and servants who partnered closely with the Apostle Paul
- Her home base is Cenchreae, a coastal town about five miles southeast of the city of Corinth. From Paul's words in Romans 16, we know that there was a Christian church in Cenchreae, and that Phoebe had some sort of significant role in the life of the church at Cenchreae.

+ His Writings in Relatable Snippets

Consider emphasizing this section. Those snippets are easier takeaways that the students can use to stay attracted to the Pauline epistles after this lesson.

- HG Bishop Youssef phrases the Christian personality as one that has 3 criteria: faith, good works, and wisdom. Christian believers who have the faith but do not obey the law of God, nor have discerning views of good and bad, tend to fill the Church with envy and conflicts. Those believers are the "carnal" types (Colossians 3:5). Christian believers who do good works yet maintain a shaky faith and lack wisdom are legalistic (Colossians 2:18). They feel self-righteous and more holy, and they have good morals, yet they in fact do not go to church or confess. They simply follow the law careless of their faith in Christ. Lastly are those who are wise according to the worldly standards, not God's standards. They are socially well-adjusted and easygoing, but they have no desire of serving God. These comprise the natural/philosophical type, the type that considers God's works as foolishness to them (hedonists; Colossians 2:8).
- In 1 Timothy 2:12, St. Paul states that he "does not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." Now contrary to our expectations, this verse does not shun the work of female servants today. Looking at context, back then in the city of Ephesus, Gnostic traditions included the worship of pagan goddess Diana. Old women felt responsible for passing down the fables and genealogies that came forth about Diana, and they taught those fables discourteously in the churches to arouse dissensions. Thereby, it now becomes clear that Paul was by no means a misogynist, but rather a wise and well-educated apostle rectifying the church of Ephesus.
- 1 Corinthians 13 is famous as the 'chapter of love'; Paul depicts love as that one strong, foremost gift of the Spirit ahead of which "prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, and knowledge will vanish away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Even if we are seen as fools for our radical doctrine, we can still win people through the characteristics that emanate from love. A loving heart will be lowly, exhort people in private, talk discreetly, and relish



wisdom. And on this note, we recall Jesus saying, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; ...for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 3.4: Catholic Letters

Building Block 3:
Discerning the Spirit
of The New
Testament



Objective

An overview of the Catholic letters and the reason for calling them catholic.

Application

Create a table with the Catholic letters, their authors; to whom it was written, their date and their themes

References and Resources



Scripture: [Mark 16:15](#);



Liturgy: [Hymn of the Catholic Epistle](#)



Patristics: [The Desert Fathers sayings](#); [Homilies of St. Augustine of Hippo on I John](#)



Story: [Diotrephes](#)



Other: [Bishop Youssef/Bible Study](#); [Catholic Epistles](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + “We believe in one, Holy, catholic (universal), apostolic church, and we confess one baptism for the remission of sins...” (Orthodox Creed)
 - How is our church universal? How is Christianity universal?
 - Quick trivia: the Catholic church - capital C - called itself Catholic, or universal, during the period of the reformation in order to assert that the reformed Protestant churches arising at the time were not legit. Be it as it may, the original person credited for using that term is St. Ignatius of Antioch in the 1st century.
 - How could the 7 catholic epistles be universal, then? Like the Pauline epistles, those epistles were written around the first century, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ by a few decades. While St. Paul was not one of the 12, the Catholic epistles were written by people from the 12 apostles! What does that mean? What can you infer now?
 - St. Paul preached around the whole world, and accordingly Abouna goes around the whole church during the Pauline procession of incense. The 12 apostles, on the other hand, preached only in Judea and Samaria during the beginning of their ministry. God told them to stay there. Thus, Abouna only goes around the first chorus during the Praxis procession of incense.
 - The epistles are titled by the name of the apostle, the sender, not the receiver, because those epistles were intended for a general audience, and for however many churches that can lay hand on those epistles. So, you see, although they did not preach in all of the churches, they still responded to the needs of the early church and stayed in the loop with churches abroad.
- + What are the catholic letters (epistles)?
 - The Catholic Epistles give us a good view into early Christian theology and practice.
 - These letters highlight the importance of love.
 - They explore the certainty of trials and testing in life that are ultimately from God and therefore strengthen faith (James and I Peter).
 - There are seven catholic letters; James, I and 2 Peter, I, 2 and 3 John and Jude.
 - These are Catholic letters because the term “catholic” means universal. Unlike St. Paul’s letters which are written to a specific group or individuals.
 - Christians have received these books as part of holy Scripture from the beginning.
 - The early church thought they were written in order to defend orthodox faith and morals against the rising challenge of heretics.
 - The catholic epistles are read at every Liturgy. The verses chosen to be read during the Liturgy are tied to the Gospel of the day.
- + “Scripture brought me to the gate of paradise, and the mind stood in wonder as it entered” (St. Ephrem)

The Catholic epistles address working through our faith and can be summed up into the abbreviation JPJJ - James, Peter, John, Jude (JPJJ is not a menswear brand name... yet). Repeating that mnemonic over and over will help your children have a strong memory of the Catholic epistles. The epistles are presented below in the pattern of occasion, purpose, and theme.

+ What does the epistle of James entail?

- St. James was the cousin of Jesus Christ. He was the first bishop of Jerusalem. [St. James the just](#)
- He wrote this letter to Jewish believers scattered over the world probably around 55 to 60 A.D. It was written after the martyrdom of St. Stephen.
- The epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes of the Dispersion," which means those of the twelve tribes dispersed in other countries than Palestine (James 1:1).
- It contains 5 chapters.
- Its occasion: Jewish extremism, trials and tribulations, 55-60AD + new church, still working on solidifying their faith in Christ.
- Purpose: practical faith... harmony of faith and works, live your faith in all circumstances by taming the tongue, loving your brother, bringing deviants back to the church, and bearing persecution through the armor of faith.
- The people, St. James epistle addresses, are experiencing various trials: persecution, deception, economic injustice, poverty, apostasy and personal fragmentations in the church.
- At the same time many warnings and reproaches are introduced that are appropriate to all times and places.
- The epistle is especially noted for the most elaborate lesson on the control of the tongue that is to be found in the Bible.
- Tradition describes James as man of prayer, which explains the emphasis on prayer in his letter
- It was said that he prayed so much, his knees were as hard as those on a camel

+ What do the two epistles of St. Peter preach?

- Its occasion: church solidity in a hostile world: church attacks from the outside
- The first epistle of St. Peter is a letter of encouragement to the church of Asia Minor when he found out they were being persecuted.
- It was written between 50 and 67 A.D. when he was in Rome.
- Purpose: what is the core of the church? Going gradually from the bottom up, the church grows from a Christian individual, submissive to the Church fathers and to the Word of God, then wife submissive to her husband, then both submit to their masters at work (give what is to Caesar to Caesar), and above all to our Father in heaven!
- By wisely articulating this holistic view of the church core, St. Peter was able to convince the churches of the Roman empire to bear persecution under Nero as a testimony to their faith and their firm grounds.
- St. Peter addresses in part the same disciples addressed by St. James. They are "sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia as Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1).
- The theme of the first epistle is rejoice in sharing the sufferings of Christ.
- The second epistle of St. Peter was written between 63 and 67 A.D when he was imprisoned in Rome.
- The Purpose: what types of attacks weaken the church from within? Now that you know the core of the church from the bottom to the top, you know that divisions from within the church would be categorized as false teachers, heretics, and others who deviate from the one, true Word of God. How would the occasion bring up church divisions? It's a new church, and the Jews feel threatened by the presence of a solid, new faith around contradicting their beliefs. Jews will tempt our doctrine, stretching it left and right, only to find a tiny blemish to weaken us from within.
- In this the apostle addresses the same persons, and mainly for the same purpose (2 Peter 3:1,2).
- It contains two predictions, the first in the second chapter respecting false teachers who were to arise in the church; and the second, in the third chapter, respecting the coming of Christ to judgment, and the destruction of the present heavens and earth.

+ With around 2500 words, this Sunday School lesson is about as long as St. John's first epistle. With only 297 words, 3 John is the shortest book in the Bible and with only 301 words 2 John is a close second.

- The Gospel of John was designed to produce faith so that we might have life (Jn 20:30-31)
- However, it is The First Epistle of John which describes the nature of that life in greater detail.
- The author is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus.
- The first epistle is not addressed to any particular class of disciples, and therefore, it is catholic or general.
- The epistle is devoted to calls and stresses to reject sin and encourages the love of one another.
- Loving one another is more repeatedly described here than in any other part of the New Testament; and this has led to call the apostle John

“The Apostle of Love.”

- He was evidently a very old man when he wrote, for he addresses the disciples of all ages and classes as "Little children," "My little children" {1 John 2:1,12,13,18,28; 1 John 3:7,18; 1 John 4:4; 1 John 5:21}.
- The second epistle: The epistle is addressed to "the elect lady and her children."
- Taken literally, the epistle is written to a particular woman and her children.
- Some have supposed the Greek words for "elect lady" may refer to given names, such as: Electa the Lady, The chosen Kyria.
- Taken figuratively, it could refer to a local church
- The writer designates himself by the title, "The Elder" {2 John 1:1}.
- St. John outlived by very many years all of the other apostles.
- The theme is 'walking in truth and love'.
- The purpose of writing this epistle is to encourage brotherly love, and keeping the commandments of God and warn against supporting or encouraging false teachers.
- The third epistle: Another brief note from addressed to a brother named Gaius
- Gaius appears five times in the New Testament (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14; 3 Jn 1:1)
- Whether he is one of those mentioned by St. Luke or St. Paul cannot be determined
- He was evidently a dear friend of St. John known for his hospitality
- The theme is 'Do not imitate what is evil, but what is good'
- The purpose of the epistle is threefold, related to the three men mentioned by name
- To confirm that Gaius did right in supporting those teachers who came his way, encouraging him to continue this hospitality
- To express his disapproval of Diotrephes for rejecting St. John and others whom he should have received.
- These two epistles are of great value in that they throw light upon the loving relations existing between the aged apostle and his faithful to co-laborers, both men and women, and upon the disruptive conduct of unconverted or half-converted men who even then had crept into the churches. This last circumstance prevents us from being surprised or disheartened when we see the same thing in our own day.
- "Abba Zeno said, 'If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.'
- The example of Diotrephes, *"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church."* (3 John 1:9-10)

+ What does the catholic letter of St. Jude preach?

- The author of this epistle is the same who is elsewhere called Judas, Luke 6:16, who was one of the twelve apostles of Christ, whose name was also Lebbaeus, and whose surname was Thaddaeus, Matthew 10:3
- "brother of James"; not the son of Zebedee, but of Alphaeus, Matthew 10:2; and this he mentions partly to distinguish himself from others of that name, as Judas Iscariot, and Judas called Barsabbas; and partly for the sake of honor and credit, St. James being a very great man, a man of great note and esteem, and who seemed to be a pillar in the church.
- He was also called the brother of Jesus.
- He is one of four that were called brothers of Jesus.
- According to St. Jerome the brothers of Jesus were His cousins.
- In the Middle-East tradition cousins are often called brothers.
- St. Jude chose not to accentuate his physical relation to Jesus, but his spiritual one ("a bondservant of Jesus Christ," Jude 1:1; 1 Jm 1:1).
- The purpose of his epistle to exhort the brethren to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.
- St. Jude was very eager to write to his readers about salvation.
- But the presence of ungodly men and the danger of them leading Christians astray forced him to change the purpose
- Apparently these false teachers were trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them license to sin.
- Their sins would no longer be held against them
- St. Jude thought it imperative that his readers be on guard against such men and be prepared to oppose their perverted teaching with the truth about God's saving grace.
- He reminds the brethren that the apostles had predicted the appearance of such men, and that their coming was therefore not a matter of surprise.
- He closes with a benediction which is one of the most beautiful and appropriate to be found in any literature.

+ St Augustine on St John the beloved - sappy or genuine? (Contemplations on the Catholic Epistles)

Consider emphasizing this section. Those snippets are easier takeaways that the students can use to stay attracted to the Catholic epistles after this lesson.

- You may think that contrary to the rest of the catholic epistles, St. John the Beloved - the one disciple who always leans on Christ's chest - will be obsessed with love for no reason, and will be less pragmatic about the afflictions facing the church. But, just because he did not use that



same tone of urgency and harsh admonition that Peter used, does not mean that he cares any less about it. It only means that he, contrary to other disciples, knows how to needle the rebellious nonbelievers most poignantly by elaborating on love as the core of our unity in Christ. St. Augustine got a grip of St. John's epistles well enough to boil it down to this: "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance, to seek Him the greatest adventure, to find Him the greatest human achievement."

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 3.5: Revelation

Building Block 3:
Discerning the Spirit
of The New
Testament



Objective

To understand the book of Revelation, its purpose, its author and its relation to the rest of the Bible.

Application

Use one or two verses and contemplate the meaning.

To have Hope in the second coming of Christ and to prepare ourselves accordingly.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Revelation 1:3](#); [Revelation 3:20](#); [Revelation 21:1](#)



Liturgy: [Bright Saturday Revelation Reading](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#)



Story: [St. John the Beloved exiled](#)



Other: [Legacy Curriculum G6 July Week 2](#), [G8 Pentecost Week 5 and 6](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + What do you think Heaven will be like? Will it be floating on clouds? Lots of singing? Allow time for responses.
 - Explain that the Bible does not share all of the details, but it gives us some clues about what Heaven might be like. The most important thing it tells us is that things will be beautiful and new, and that we will be with God. The book of Revelation talks about what will happen at the end of the world that we know.
- + The first book of the Bible, Genesis, begins with the creation of this heaven and this earth. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, ends with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.:
 - The Holy Bible began with the Book of Genesis that proclaimed the endless love of God towards man. He created everything for him, bestowed authority upon him and granted him that much dignity. However, soon we see the disobedience of Adam and Eve and their fall.
 - Then we see them leaving Paradise expelled and bearing upon their shoulders the bitter crime of rebellion.
 - But thanks be to God who did not leave man to live in this way. He concluded His Bible by the Book of Revelation giving us a joyous picture; an open gate in heaven and Eternal Paradise awaiting humanity. What a delightful and splendid book that is appropriate for every believer to hold, keep at heart, meditate on, and constantly repeat day and night. It is the book of hope, victory and praise; entirely, the book of heaven.
 - A promise of blessing is made in the very first chapter of the book to those who read and hear the words of this prophecy.
 - A blessing to the person who obeys, keeps, and believes what it says.
 - How can we deprive ourselves from this blessing by not reading it claiming it is difficult, hard to understand, and mysterious?
 - This book is read entirely on the Bright Saturday
- + St. John (the Evangelist) was banished on the island of Patmos when suddenly he heard a loud and majestic voice exclaiming “I am the Alpha and the Omega.”. It was the voice of God!
 - Title:
 - Revelation is often described as “the Revelation of John” meaning the revelation to John. It is actually a revelation of Christ (I:1). The book of Revelation is the unveiling of the future to see it in the hands of the Lord who controls history and is the Master of it
 - Author
 - It is the Evangelist St. John. He was the son of Zebedee, and his mother's name was Salome [Matthew 4:21, 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:1]. To John was committed by our Lord the highest of privileges, the care of His mother [John 19:27]. When Christ appeared on the shore in the dusk of morning, John was the first to recognize Him.
 - As early as the second century A.D., church fathers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria identified the apostle John as the author of the book of Revelation.



- Justin made this claim in his Dialogue with Trypho, chapter 81. Justin's testimony is particularly valuable because he lived in Ephesus in the early second century, among people who had known John personally.
- Irenaeus mentioned John's authorship in his work Against Heresies, book 4, chapter 18, section II. His testimony is also very helpful, because Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, who in turn had been a disciple of the apostle John. As a result, Irenaeus was in a superior position to know which works John had actually written.
- Irenaeus says that St. John did not settle at Ephesus until after the death SS. Peter and Paul. Saint Jerome says that he supervised and governed all the Churches of Asia.
- St. John did not mention his name in the Gospel and the three Epistles he wrote out of humility. But he mentioned his name in this book as the author because he speaks about prophecies and in order to trust them it is necessary to know the author to whom God revealed these predictions.
- Date:
 - St. Irenaeus says that this Revelation was revealed at the end of Domitian's reign (81-96 A.D). Domitian was a particularly cruel Roman emperor, who reigned from AD 81 - 96
- Place of Writing:
 - Internal and external evidence seem to support Patmos, modern day 'Piteno'. The Apostle wrote it when he was exiled (1:9)
 - When John wrote the Book of Revelation he was a prisoner. The Roman government didn't appreciate someone telling their citizens that Rome wasn't the most powerful force there was. So the Romans would put these "prophets" or "future tellers" in jail, to keep them from spreading anti-Roman ideas. The worst of those prisoners went into exile. Not only were they in prison, but they were taken to an island, all by themselves, where they do work in mines all day. Alone, in exile, for their crimes, they would often spend years on this deserted island.
 - So it's here on the island of Patmos that John tells us what he saw in this vision from God.
- The Recipients
 - The Revelation was addressed to the seven Asian churches that were under the guidance of St. John the Evangelist.
 - Since this letter is from the Lord of the Church, it certainly carries a communal message concerning the life of Church in the whole world in all ages, especially in the days of the Antichrist
- The Theme:
 - The theme is stated in 17:14. It is the victory of Christ and of His church over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers
- Divisions of the Book of Revelation:
 - The Seven Churches 1 - 3; The Prophetic Revelations 4 - 20; The Glory of Heavenly Jerusalem 21 - 2

+ "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"

Consider chanting this in the tune used in the Vigil of the Apocalypse to get the students' attention.

- Our Journey
 - Revelation begins by describing the things of the time of St. John the beloved through all ages until the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It describes the Church at the time of St. John and ends by showing us and describing Heaven and the Eternal Kingdom. Some scholars say that the first three chapters are from earth and the last two are from Heaven. From chapter 4-20 is a description of the church journey from earth to heaven with all its pain and persecutions
- A Prophecy
 - It is the only prophetic Scripture in the New Testament. John clearly identifies his work as a prophecy (Rev. 1:3; Rev. 22:7, 10, 18-19; Rev. 19:10), and he is viewed as a prophet (Rev. 22:9; Rev. 10:7, 11; Rev. 22:6)
- Is Symbolic
 - It contains about 300 symbols
 - Speaking with symbols indicates that the facts mentioned here cannot be expressed or explained in human language
- A Message of Hope
 - This Book provided the persecuted Christians a sense of hope that would encourage them to remain faithful to Christ despite the fact that at any moment they could be put to death for the Faith
- A Reference
 - The Book of Revelation is a reference to the Church rites, rituals, dogma, and services.
 - The use of light and the of incense (Revelations 8:3); the praises we sing (i.e., Holy God, Holy Mighty, Thine is the power), kneeling during our prayers, standing in the church, the white clerical clothing that the priests and deacons wear, and the church rituals are a



copy of what was described in Revelation.

- The best example is the celebration of the Bright Saturday (night of the Apocalypse) which is called after the name of this book
- Number seven
 - St. Augustine “The number seven signifies the perfection of the universal Church, for which reason the Apostle John writes to the seven churches, showing in that way that he writes to the totality of the one Church.” (City of God 17.4)
 - The Seven churches (1:4,11) or the Seven Lampstands (1:12,20); The Seven Spirits (1:4); The Seven Lamps of burning fire (4:5); The Seven Seals (5:1; 6:1-8; 8:1); The Seven Horns (5:6); The Seven Eyes (5:6); The Seven Trumpets (8:2; 11:9); The Seven talking thunders (10:3,4); The Seven thousand Slain due to the earthquake (11:13); The Seven Heads (12:3); The Seven Crowns on his heads (12:3); The Seven Bowls and the Seven Plagues (15:1; 16:21); The Seven Mountains (17:9); The Seven Kings (17:10)
- + There have been at least 174 false predictions of the end of the world. Don’t hold your breath, but be ready.
 - Revelation and End of Time: Many have distorted the Book of Revelation by changing its interpretation into a search for the details of future events and matters that we do not have to investigate. And it is far too common for Christians to focus exclusively on the predictive nature of prophecy. The end is always drawing nearer. The prophecies of Christ from the gospels and the book of Revelation can be seen clearly. Christ gives us these revelations and prophecies not to try to determine the day of the end but encourages us to be always ready for this end. We must gather strength from Him throughout our whole life or when the days of tribulation and judgment we will be unready. We should always have confidence in Him and His grace and protection
 - The Mystery of This Book: One cannot comprehend or explain the Book of Revelation entirely. Pope Dionysius of Alexandria says: [...having formed an idea of it as a composition exceeding my capacity of understanding, I regard it as containing a hidden and wonderful intelligence on the several subjects which come under it. For though I cannot comprehend it, I still suspect that there is some deeper sense underlying the words. And I do not measure or judge its expressions by the standard of my own reason, but, making more allowance for faith, I have simply regarded them too lofty for my comprehension; and I do not forthwith reject what I have not been able to discern its importance.”
 - Take a moment to meditate on what we would do if we knew this coming week was the great and awful end of world. What sins would we attempt to repent from and leave forever? What mysteries would you be sure to partake of to prepare you? Confession? Communion? The saints became saints partly because one their meditations was the end of their lives. It was perpetually before their eyes each day in preparation and love for God.



Building Block 4: Discerning the Root of my Identity

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 4.1: Defining Oneself

Building Block 4:
Discerning my
Journey to Joy



Objective

Understanding the true way that we should define ourselves as Christians. Where do we get this identity and what are ways we mistake our identity?

Application

Be confident in who you are and how special God created you. When you have confidence in yourself, you will be able to overcome any challenges you face such as peer pressure from your peers. Sit with yourself and identify special talents that God has granted you that make you unique.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Romans 8:15](#), [Philippians 3:20](#), [James 4:6](#), [Micah 7:8](#)



Liturgy: Aripalin



Patristics: [St Gregory of Nyssa on Image and Likeness](#)



Story: Daniel and the Three Youth in Captivity



Other: [H.G. Bishop David's Lecture on Identity](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Is knowledge of our identity important?

Consider having a short discussion with the students about what identity means. How would you define yourself?

- Your identity is who you are. This includes where you came from, who created you, and what your purpose is.
- Understanding our identity is crucial to giving purpose and direction to our lives. How we define our identity determines what decisions we make.
- You make your decisions, plans, and solve problems based on who you believe you are.
- For example, if someone believes their identity is a soccer player, they will dress like a soccer player, train to become better, watch soccer, try and imitate famous soccer players, etc.
- If we understand who we truly are, we will be able to discern what actions are best suited for me.

+ How do we as Christians define our identity?

Consider asking what it means for a definition to be objective vs subjective?

- As Christians, we want a true and objective definition of our identity to properly define ourselves.
- We get the objective definition of our identity from the Bible.
- As Christians who are baptized, we are born again into the kingdom of God as His adopted children. (Romans 8:15)
- As Christians, St. Paul teaches us that our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20)
- If we have our citizenship in heaven, then we ought to live as citizens of heaven.
- This means that at all times we are representatives of the Kingdom of God.

+ What are some false identities and their dangers?

- The devil always tempts us by giving us false identities to try and make us forget who we really are.
- When someone does not know who they really are, they can't have direction in their life and will seek after the wrong goals.
- A key example of this is the story of Daniel and the Three Youth who were taken captive by the Babylonians. The king changed their names from their traditional Jewish names of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- He did this to try and erase their previous identity and remove the desire within them to live according to Jewish customs.
- Satan does this with us when he gives us false identities.



- Two ways he gets us to falsely identify ourselves is either with our successes, or with our failures.

+ Does my success define me?

- Sometimes we are tempted to define our identity based on our successes or the things we are talented at.
- This has two main dangers: the first is that we base our identity as something that can be taken away from us.
- For example, if we define ourselves as the most talented artist, then once we meet someone who is more artistic than us we feel like we have lost our identity.
- The second issue is that it can lead to pride.
- St. James is very clear when he says that God resists the proud (James 4:6)

+ Do my failures define me?

- The other way we are tempted is by defining ourselves by our failures.
- The devil does this to make us despair and not have hope in God.
- He wants us to consider ourselves as worthless and not worthy of God's love because we have sinned.
- Listen to what St. Gregory of Nyssa says about our identity and remember this when you feel discouraged "You alone are a reflection of eternal beauty, a receptacle of happiness, an image of the true light. And, if you look to Him, you will become what He is, imitating Him who shines within you, whose glory is reflected in your purity. Nothing in the entire creation can equal your grandeur." (Persons in Communion, p.27) Even when we sin, we are still the Children of God and we only need to return to him in repentance and confession.
- Let us say with Micah the Prophet: "Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me." (Micah 7:8)

+ How do we find balance?

- We should take the middle road and have a mentality of knowing that I am weak and a sinner, but also remembering the honour that we are given by God as a free gift.
- Don't let the devil tempt you into either extreme.
- Keep your identity firm and not based on external factors which make it subjective.



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 4.2: Knowledge of God and Ourselves

Building Block 4:
Discerning my
Journey to Joy



Objective

To understand the importance of growing in knowing God

Application

Volunteer at church this week. Using the talents and gifts that God gave us in order to display His likeness.

Try this week to concentrate on your talents and let them shine through when you face both good and bad situations using discernment. This may mean resisting peer pressure.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Jeremiah 9:23-24](#), [John 17:3](#), [Philippians 3:8](#)



Liturgy: "[Ineffable is the power of your wisdom...](#)", "[given to me the learning of Your knowledge...](#)" - Gregorian Liturgy



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom Homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew](#)



Story: [Enoch](#)



Other: [The Knowledge of Christ, Article by HG Bishop Youssef](#); [Religious Knowledge, Suscopts Article](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

Lesson Adapted from the Suscopts Knowledge of Christ Article

+ Why is it important to know God?

- It is important that those who have believed in Jesus Christ to continue to grow in the knowledge of Him.
- It Glorifies God and leads to Salvation.
- It can help us love God. We only can love and trust someone as much as we know them.
- "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:23-24)
- "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3)
- Eternal life is entering into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Eternal life begins the moment the relationship starts.
- Knowing God helps us with a better understanding of our own identity. Before we can appreciate who we are, we need to know who made us and why we are here on the earth. Therefore the more we learn about God, the more we will be able to learn about ourselves.

+ Sacrificing for the sake of knowing Christ

- Sharing in suffering must come before sharing in glory, "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).
- Having fellowship with His sufferings: "Whoever wishes to escape from tribulation, escapes from God" (St. Paul the first hermit). Pain is a blessing and brokenness a prerequisite in Christianity simply because God's power cannot be manifested except in our weakness that we may fully understand that it is not our might nor power. God allows the cross in our lives not just to see us suffer but for the sake of building our inner man. "That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9)
- Enoch maintained a close daily walk with God: Enoch lived to be 365 years old (Genesis 5:23). Enoch was the only man who never died. The Bible makes this remarkable statement: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5). Enoch was a prophet. One of his most important prophecies, about the Lord's future judgment of evil men, is quoted in Jude 1:14-15

+ The Development of Knowledge

- Intuition: It is the unmediated perception of some condition or reality. The problem with intuitive knowledge is that it is difficult to share it



effectively with others. Throughout the ages, people have had "intuitive" knowledge of divine things. Nearly every culture and race of people has had some sense of the divine.

- Deduction: Deductive reasoning is a type of deduction used in science and in life. It is when you take two true statements, or premises, to form a conclusion. For example, A is equal to B. B is also equal to C. Given those two statements, you can conclude A is equal to C using deductive reasoning. People may argue for the existence of God on the basis of deductive reasoning. Yet most theologians hold that one cannot adequately "prove" or "disprove" the existence of God.
- Experiment: It is a method by which people test ideas. We call these ideas "Hypotheses" which are mere assumptions about how things work. Repeatedly verified hypotheses provide us with "scientific knowledge"
- Experience: We say, you do not really know what it means to be (....) until it has happened to you. The hypothesis is that God exists and loves us, the experiment is to conform one's life to His ways, the proof is found in the results it produces.
- Revelation: It is a way of knowing something when someone tells us what we could not otherwise know. When the doctor asks you how you feel, you "reveal" to him your aches and pains. We know God, also, when God makes Himself known to us. The Scriptures are a record of God's self-revelation to His creatures.

+ Benefits of Growing in the Knowledge of God

- Growth in Christian virtue. With Christ's Resurrection we received the potential to grow in His knowledge till we become in His likeness "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- Power to witness. Our role on earth, as Christians, is to preach Christ and witness to others. "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).
- Christ announced it clearly that we are salt to the earth and light to the world (Matthew 5:13). It is for the salt to remain active and for the light to remain shining.
- "He calls "salt" the frame of mind that is filled with the apostolic word, which is full of understanding. When it has been sown in our souls, it allows the word of wisdom to dwell in us. It has been compared with salt because of salt's good taste and delightfulness. For without salt neither bread nor fish is edible. So too without the apostles' understanding and instruction, every soul is dull and unwholesome and unpleasant to God." - Cyril of Alexandria ; "It is as a matter of absolute necessity that he commands all this.
- Why must you be salt? Jesus says in effect: "You are accountable not only for your own life but also for that of the entire world. I am sending you not to one or two cities, nor to ten or twenty, nor even to one nation, as I sent the prophets. Rather, I am sending you to the entire earth, across the seas, to the whole world, to a world fallen into an evil state." For by saying, "You are the salt of the earth," Jesus signifies that all human nature itself has "lost its taste," having become rotten through sin. For this reason, you see, he requires from his disciples those character traits that are most necessary and useful for the benefit of all." - St. John Chrysostom Homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew

+ What responsibility do I have knowing that I bear God's image?

- Always keep in mind that you are made in God's image and your actions display that.
- Your actions, behaviours, words are all influential and make a difference.
- Be mindful that everything you do and say should be according to God's commandments and should reflect His Image.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 4.3: Contentment, Happiness, Joy

Building Block 4:
Discerning my
Journey to Joy



Objective

To understand the difference between happiness, joy, and contentment while realizing that God is the source of all and these would all be in vain and momentary without Him.

Application

Try to avoid earthly desires or temporary happiness and focus on eternal happiness and contentment.

Try to take a negative or hurtful situation and pray about it. You will find that God will intervene and turn a bad situation into a good one and He will make visible the good that comes from it. We can also use discernment to choose to attend church services which may grant us true joy as opposed to playing games that may only grant us temporary happiness.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Exodus 16:11-18](#); [2 Samuel 11:2-4](#); [Psalm 84:11, 90:14, 145:15](#); [John 21:17-22](#); [1 Corinthians 2:12](#); [2 Corinthians 12:10](#); [Galatians 5:22-23](#); [Philippians 4:11-13](#); [1 Timothy 6:6-8](#); [Hebrew 13:5](#)



Liturgy: "Fill our hearts with joy and gladness..." - [Litany of the Season, Basilian Liturgy](#)



Patristics: [Treatise 7: On Mortality - St. Cyprian \(para. 5\)](#), [St. Basil the Great](#); [St. Isaac the Syrian](#)



Story: [St. Paul](#)



Other: [How to Achieve a Life of Joy - HG Bishop David \(NYNE\)](#), [SUS Diocese Legacy Curriculum - Grade II: Filler #7](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What are contentment, happiness, and joy? What's the difference between them?

Consider providing examples, preferably biblical, for each. The book of Phillipians focuses heavily on rejoicing and being content regardless of circumstances.

- Our society tries hard to convince us that things will make us happy, that we should feel happy all the time, and that we should be able to get happy quickly. But is that societal definition true happiness? Sometimes we say, "I feel so happy!" or "I am not happy right now," as though happiness is simply a feeling. Is true happiness just a feeling that fluctuates as our emotions do?
- Happiness, or the state of being happy, is a temporary state. Happiness tends to be momentary and can be disturbed by life circumstances. For example, a certain event with a friend can provide happiness, but if someone loses a friend, that event might not bring happiness anymore.
- Contentment is the sense of inner peace rooted in satisfaction and thanksgiving. In St Paul's Epistle to the Phillipians, he emphasises the idea of being content no matter what circumstance you are in: "11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." - [Philippians 4:11-13](#)
- Joy is among the Fruit of the Holy Spirit listed by St Paul the Apostle. Real joy comes from a real relationship with Christ that feeds our Spirit. True joy isn't materialistic nor superficial, but it is pure and fills your whole spirit with happiness and fulfillment. Unlike happiness, joy is eternal!
- "The soul that loves God has its rest in God and in God alone. In all the paths that men walk in in the world, they do not attain peace until they draw nigh to hope in God." (St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 56, 89)

+ How can someone find joy and contentment?

- Joy and contentment can be found through prayer; joy and contentment, or gladness, comes from a strong relationship with God and it all begins in prayer. In the Liturgy of St. Basil, the priest prays in the Litany of the Season for God to "Fill our hearts with joy and gladness that we, too, having sufficiency in everything may abound in every good deed."
- Joy and contentment can also be found by involving God in all the details of our lives. St Cyprian says, "To see Christ is to rejoice, and we cannot have joy unless we see him. What blindness of mind or what foolishness is it to love the world's afflictions, and punishments and tears, and not rather to rush to the joy that can never be taken away."



- Through sincere repentance, we can find: "Blessed are they who weep, for they shall laugh." They, therefore, who spend the days of their life, which is already at its consummation and declining toward its setting, in weeping for their sins, these will be glad in that true morning that is approaching. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," of course, in the future." - St. Basil
- The example of St. Paul: He was a Pharisee who hated Christians and persecuted them, yet was touched by Jesus and transformed into one of the greatest champions for Christ, started many of the early churches and wrote many of the books of the New Testament. His circumstances throughout his ministry were some of the worse any man has ever had to endure, even prison. Yet it was from prison where he wrote the "Book of Joy," Philippians.
- "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus... For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain... make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, untied in spirit, intent on one purpose... Do all things without grumbling or disputing... Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord... forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus... Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 1, 2, 3, & 4)

+ What are signs of joy and contentment?

- Joy destroys sadness—in tragedy, it gives patience; in prayers, it gives grace; in labors and struggles, it gives delight; in obedience, it gives merriment; in hospitality, it gives shelter; in hope, it gives recourse; in mourning, it gives comfort; in sorrow, it gives assistance; in love, it gives decoration; and in patience, it gives reward.
- "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)
- Those who have joy and contentment will also show thankfulness to God for every condition.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 4.4: What is Sin and How Does it Impact Me?

Building Block 4:
Discerning my
Journey to Joy



Objective

To understand the root of our sin and its impact on our relationship with God and our inner peace

Application

Attempt to identify the root causes of different sins and present a plan to your father of confession. Focus on a sin you battle with and with prayer, confession, contemplation, you will be able to find a solution and overcome the sin.

Everytime you are faced with a sin and are about to commit a sin, Pray "My Lord Jesus Christ strengthen me and be with me."

References and Resources



Scripture: [James 1:14-16](#)



Liturgy: [Agepya's 12th Hour Litany](#)



Patristics: Irenaeus, Against Heresies



Story: St. Peter



Theology Academy: [Implications of Morality](#)



Other: [How sin affects my Relationship with God, Suscopts Article](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What is sin and what is wrong with it?

- God calls us to be one with Him (John 17:21) through a life of holiness and perfection (Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16)
- Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2)
- If God is the source of life, then separation from Him will lead to death.
- Sin is also an act of going against our identity. For example, being made in the image of God, it is part of our identity to love and forgive. When we hate and choose not to forgive, we act against our identity.
- St. John Chrysostom says, "Since it is likely that, being men, they would sin every day, St. Paul consoles his hearers by saying 'renew yourselves' from day to day."
- But do not sin, O man, expecting that you will repent; and do not succumb [to sin] being confident of forgiveness! Remember that death will not delay. Do not craftily seek means to draw nigh the pleasure of sin with a knavish mind! God is not mocked [Gal. 6:7]. His knowledge precedes your thoughts. Affliction will overtake you suddenly, and when you cry out, He will not answer you." St. Isaac the Syrian, [The Ascetical Homilies](#), Homily 64

+ What are the consequences of sin?

- Life with God produces the fruits of the Spirit, of which we find ourselves in peace, love and joy.
- Separation from God: We separate ourselves from the source of this fruit and thus sin disturbs the Joy, love and peace and all sources of good. Furthermore, it may enslave us and weaken our relationship with God. Causing us to be more distant from God and cause us to fall into a spiral of sin. This makes it more difficult to change our focus and return back to God. It's never too late to return back to God as He is always waiting with open arms for us to return back to Him.
- "Pay attention carefully. After the sin comes the shame; courage follows repentance. Did you pay attention to what I said? Satan upsets the order; he gives the courage to sin and the shame to repentance." St. John Chrysostom, Homily 8, [On Repentance and Almsgiving \(Fathers of the Church Patristic Series\)](#).
- Through repentance & confession and a proper battle against sin, grace reunites us to the Lord; "No one, indeed while placed out of reach of our Lord's benefits, has power to procure for himself the means of salvation. So the more we receive His grace, the more we should love Him" (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. IV, ch. XIII); "Mere renouncement of sin is not sufficient for the salvation of penitents, but fruits worthy of penance are also required of them" (St. Basil, The Morals, I, 3).



+ We battle against sin that we may preserve the Fruit of the Spirit

- Take the Verse " But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." James 1:14-15 and have the youth attempt to build the following equation:
- Temptation = Desire + Opportunity (v14)
- Sin = Temptation + Action (v15)
- Sin = Desire + Opportunity + Action
- Removing one, keeps us from Sin. Thus we can try to determine 3 ways to avoid sin.
 1. Remove the action through the virtue of Self-Control
 - * Keep in mind that a full lesson on the subject is given in the Freedom Building Block. This is simply an introduction to the matter of self-control.
 2. Removing the Opportunity, by staying away from the root causes that lead to sin
 3. Removing the desire by cleaning the desire to sin (much more difficult but through grace and prayer can be achieved in the long run).
 - * Keep in mind that a full lesson on the subject is given in the Freedom Building Block. This is simply an introduction to the matter of overcoming temptation.

+ Did the disciples sin?

- The Apostle Peter is not someone that most people think of when they hear the word sinner, but St. Peter was not perfect. Jesus reprimanded St. Peter and the other disciples repeatedly while He was on Earth. Then, when Jesus was arrested, Peter denied knowing Him three times in one of the most famous moments in history.
- When Christ was arrested, Peter acted out of fearfulness. He was afraid and, despite having claimed that he would gladly die beside Jesus, he frantically denied knowing Him. Peter's story shows that a person can make a new beginning at any point in time. Peter panicked and denied Christ three times when He was arrested. Later, however, Peter went on to spread the Gospel across the world, and when he was once more confronted with the choice of denying Christ or dying, Peter chose to die faithful rather than live in betrayal. This decision shows that a single moment of fearfulness does not mean a person can never again be brave.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 4.5: Establishing Boundaries

Building Block 4:
Discerning my
Journey to Joy



Objective

Determining the most precious aspects of ourselves and what can be shared and with who.

Application

Have respect for your body, soul and mind and protect it as it is the temple of God.

Be honest and true in who you are and know that God is there to protect you.

Try not to fall into the temptations of the world and concede and do what they do. Respect yourself and know that you don't have to feel pressured to do what everyone else does.

By setting boundaries, you will not find yourself in uncomfortable situations that can lead you to sin.

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Corinthians 8:7](#), [Matthew 6:5-6](#), [Matthew 6:3-4](#), [Matthew 4:1](#), [Matt 26:36](#), [Luke 9:18](#), [Matthew 5:37](#)



Liturgy: "[Of one plant you have forbidden me to eat ...](#)" - [Gregorian Liturgy](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom, The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 19.2](#)



Other: [Suscopts article on Boundaries by HG Bishop Youssef](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What does it mean to you to have healthy boundaries in a relationship/friendship?

Consider discussing the latter question and discussing what type of challenges may arise from establishing such boundaries.

- You can illustrate different types of invasion of privacy. Society in general attempts to take from you as much as they can and whatever they can.
- Learning to preserve privacy in important matters through setting boundaries is crucial.
- One can compare boundaries in the personal world to neighborhood properties. The boundary is the fence and the fence indicates who is responsible for everything inside that fence. Different properties may have different types of fences in height, material and entrances. Most importantly, each have gates, and the owner has authority over who has permission to enter.

+ Type of people without boundaries [[Extracted from Suscopts article on Boundaries by HG Bishop Youssef](#)] :

- The compliant person: These people follow the rules and regulations. Sometimes it can be bad to follow and be compliant when society tells you something is right but goes against the teachings of the Bible or the Church.
- The guilt person: These people are harsh on themselves full of self blame for things for which God does not convict them. St. Paul described these people as possessing "weak conscience" (1 Corinthians 8:7).
- The fearful person: Their deeds are prompted by fear of losing other people's acceptance, or arousing their anger, punishment, and/or devaluation or depreciation.
- The avoidance person: This person's gates are closed to the good and bad. Such people, under the misconstrued concept of "independence", refuse help either out of a feeling of unworthiness or haughtiness. Such behavior is described in the book of the Desert Fathers as lacking love when refusing to offer help and lacking humility when refusing to receive help. Independence does not annihilate interdependence.
- The Controlling person: These people cannot tolerate a 'NO'. They do what they desire but deny others their right to say 'NO' to a service they cannot perform. These people follow the rule of "My way or the highway."

+ Areas we must learn to establish boundaries and privacy

- In Prayer: Matthew 6:5-6
- In Purity: Keeping your body and soul pure for marriage. Saving yourself for marriage as marriage is a sacrament of the Church and is a pure relationship between you, your spouse and God. Ephesians 5:25-33
- In Charity: Matthew 6:3-4; "Jesus is not talking about literal left and right hands. Rather, he speaks spiritually with intentional exaggeration. "If



it is possible,” he says, “for you to remain unaware, let this be your goal. The result, if it be possible, is that your giving be concealed from the very hands that serve.” It is not, as some say, that we should hide it from wrong-headed people, for he has commanded here that it should be concealed from all.” St. John Chrysostom

- In Time: Jesus prays alone (Matthew 4:1, Matt 26:36, Luke 9:18)

+ Establishing the fence line

- What should be private and what can we share - [Privacy circles](#)
- Telephone Game. Be careful what you say and what gossip you spread. Spreading false rumors is an invasion of privacy because it is a betrayal of friendship and trust, an act of misrepresentation.
- The Holy Bible approves of the concept of 'No' as a protective weapon when applied at the right place and right time. "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37).



Building Block 5: Discerning the True Meaning of Freedom

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.I: The Meaning of True Freedom

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Objective

To understand that the way to true freedom is in submitting the free will to God. John 8:30-36.

Application

Freedom means we get to choose God's best for our lives every day. Evaluate things you believe you are chained to and need to be set free from. What are things you feel on the fence about?

Discuss them with a father of confession or spiritual father

References and Resources



Scripture: [John 8:30-36](#); [Romans 7:15,17](#), [Luke 15:16](#), [Deut. 30:15-20](#), [Luke 15: 18,19](#), [John 8:36](#), [John 8:31,32](#), [John 14:6](#)



Liturgy: [Adult Baptism commandment](#), [The Prayer of the Absolution of The Son](#).



Patristics: [Basil of Caesarea, Against Eunomius vol. 122](#), [The Fathers of the Church, 173-182](#).



Story: [Adam & Eve](#), [The Prodigal Son](#).



Other: [Ten Concepts by HH Pope Shenouda III: John 8:1-20 \(Sermon by H.G. Bishop Youssef\)](#), [iMOM- Five Facts of teenage Freedom](#), [Freedom \(Arabic\) by Fr. Daoud Lameii](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What could restrain your freedom? (authorities, parents, freedom of others, consequences.)

Consider an open discussion with the students about their own obstacles to freedom. Note that teenagers have a very deep fear of losing their freedom.

- You should discuss with your students their understanding of freedom and if this definition of freedom ultimately leads to worldly consequences.
- For instance, premarital relations can lead to pregnancies, and in some cases severe diseases. Drugs can lead to lack of focus, decreased commitment to studies which in turn present further challenges in future. These are simple worldly consequences, but there are similarly spiritual consequences.
- Here we can see clearly that freedom does not mean that there are no consequences for your actions, but rather you have the free will to make the right decisions or not.
- Worldly freedom is not sufficient.

+ What is Freedom? What does it mean to be free?

Consider discussing what it means to have freedom, and what we can do with it in our daily life.

- We were created in the image and likeness of God, which means we were created as free creatures. The very act of creation was an act of free will exercised by God Himself. When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion over all the creation. He gave them the freedom to choose the names for the animals, and all the other decisions in the created world.
- Webster definition of Freedom: the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint; the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved.
- So society's freedom is the notion that we are able to make any decision on our own and based on our own will, but does that mean there should be no consequences for our actions?
- "Freedom is a double edged sword."

- “To yield and give way to our passions is the lowest slavery, even as to rule over them is the only liberty.” St. Justin Martyr, Fragments, Fragment 18

+ Does my life with God restrain my free will? Nature of sin and true Freedom

Consider an open discussion. Let the students talk it out to understand their point of view.

- Freedom is the original nature that God created us on. But after Adam & Eve sinned, human nature was corrupted including their free will. Humans tend to not know what's good for them because of the deception of sin. They became bound to sin.
- “It is by their own freewill that they have fallen away into evil, depriving themselves of what is good” Basil of Caesarea, Against Eunomius vol.122, The Fathers of the Church, 173-182.
- “Jesus answered them, Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” (John 8:34)
- Nature of sin is enslaving, for this reason St. Paul says; “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate I do... It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me” (Rom. 7:15,17)
- In this verse, St Paul is telling us that sin is slavery in itself because it takes away from you the free will you were searching for. He found that sin has overtaken his freedom and he no longer understands what he is doing because it is not of his own will.
- Same with the prodigal son. He thought the true freedom is to take his portion of the money and leave to a far country while the true freedom was in his father's house. In his father's house, he was the son and the heir. He was free but in that far country, away from his father, “he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swins ate, and no one gave him anything” (Luke 15:16)
- God doesn't force anything on you. He's giving us the free will to do what we want. “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live, that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life” (Deut. 30:15-20)
- God gave us the commandment as a sign of love & care.

+ What is the True meaning of Freedom?

Differentiate the Christian understanding of Freedom and that of the world.

- Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to us. He desires us to be free. He who created man in the beginning made him free.
- “ O Master, Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son and the Logos of God the Father, who has broken every bond of our sins through His saving, life-giving sufferings;.... Now also we ask and beseech Your goodness, O Lover of Mankind.... Dispense to us Your mercy and loose every bond of our sins.” The Prayer of the Absolution to the Son
- Examples; compare the Prodigal son or Adam & Eve's condition in terms of freedom before and after the fall.
- Freedom comes from obedience to God. The Prodigal Son preferred to be one of his father's hired servants then being free in a far country. He understood that the True Freedom is in the Father's company not in earthly materialistic possessions. “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will rise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son, Make me like one of your hired servants.’” (Luke 15:18-19)

+ How to attain True Freedom?

- True Freedom is found in God's company. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36)
- Still how do we attain True Freedom? “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32)
- Abide in His Word --> Be His disciples --> Know the Truth --> Made Free
- To abide in His Word is to partake of His Body & Blood, to dig deep in His Word & study the Bible, to participate in the Church sacraments. “The day on which you were born, you were a slave and not free. But today, you have become a conqueror over the plots of the wicked” Adult Baptism commandment
- That will lead us to become His followers “disciples”. This fellowship will lead to a personal relationship with God. The more our relationship with Him is deeper the more we realize that God is truth and that is the True Freedom. “Jesus said to him ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” (John 14:6)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.2: Self-Control

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Objective

To understand that expressing self-control is a way to preserve our freedom

Application

As a spiritual exercise, discuss with your father of confession how to exercise self-control over a sin you're committing.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Matthew 19:27](#), [Proverbs 16:32](#), [1 Samuel 24](#),
[Philippians 1:21](#), [1 Corinthians 9](#), [Mark 9:35](#), [2 Timothy 4:8](#)



Liturgy: [Prime Prayer](#), [Midnight Prayer](#)



Patristics: Abba Arsenius - [Paradise of the Fathers Volume 2](#)



Story: [Nehemiah](#)



Other: [Sermon on the Virtue of Self-Control by HG Bishop Youssef](#); [Legacy SUS Curriculum G10 Filler Lesson 3](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Self control is...

- The ability to control oneself, in particular one's emotions and desires or the expression of them in one's behavior, especially in difficult situations. It is similar to Self-discipline, self-restraint, self-mastery, will power.
- In other words, Self-control is the ability to regulate and alter your responses in order to avoid undesirable behaviors, increase desirable ones, and achieve long-term goals.
- So self-control is a life skill to help you achieve your goals by making right choices & avoiding wrong ones.
- From a spiritual point of view, self control is mastery over lusts of the mind & the flesh.
- Sin = Desire + Opportunity + Action (**previously discussed in the previous building block*). Self-Control is the ability to control your action that makes you not sin despite being tempted and potentially having the opportunity.

+ Self-Control prevents massive problems

- It prevents massive problems. Most of the problems that plague modern individuals in our society – addiction, overeating, crime, domestic violence, sexually transmitted diseases, prejudice, debt, unwanted pregnancy, educational failure, underperformance at school and work, lack of savings, failure to exercise – have some degree of self control failure as a central aspect.
- It's a way of success because it increases your ability to achieve your long term goals. Psychology has identified two main traits that seem to produce an immensely broad range of benefits: intelligence and self-control. Despite many decades of trying, psychology has not found much one can do to produce lasting increases in intelligence. But self-control can be strengthened. Therefore, self-control is a rare and powerful opportunity for psychology to make a palpable and highly beneficial difference in the lives of ordinary people.
- Abba Ammonas was asked, 'What is the "narrow and hard way?" (Mat 7:14) he replied, 'The "narrow and hard way" is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, "Lo, we have left everything and followed you." (Mat 19:27)
- "He who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32)
- The man without self-control is enslaved. Man loses his freedom when he gives in to sin and becomes a slave to the corruption of his fleshly passions.
- David had the opportunity to kill Saul but he didn't. He only cut off a corner of Saul's robe. (1 Sam. 24) Who was more powerful in that situation? David had Self-Control. He didn't repay evil with evil yet he was more powerful than Saul.

+ Persistent enemies

- “Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates), that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.” But they thought to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?”. But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.” (Nehemiah 6:1-4)
- They were saying, “Come on Nehemiah, we just want a meeting, just a few minutes of your time for us to sit and reason together.” It sounds like a reasonable request.
- But Nehemiah knew this “reasonable request” was the work of the enemy. Nehemiah knew if they could separate him from the project just for a moment, they could take their shot. They knew that if they took out the leader, the whole project would come to an end.
- These enemies are persistent. They know Nehemiah might say no one time but if they keep coming, in a moment of distraction, in a moment of foolishness, in a moment when Nehemiah is worn out, he might give in.
- But Nehemiah’s response: (vs. 2b-3) “But they thought to do me harm. So, I sent messengers to them, saying, ‘I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.’”
- Our enemies are persistent like water dripping on a rock. What type of rock are you made of?

+ How to improve Self-Control?

- Set a Clear Goal; Any successful endeavor is unequivocally preceded by a clear goal. Likewise, St. Paul had his goal clear before him: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).
- Take an action, exercise Spiritual Practices; "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). How has St. Paul set about doing that? By:
- Fasting is a very beneficial exercise and powerful tool for developing Self Control. Fasting is the ability to say NO to the desire for food. This ability will eventually develop Self Control and strengthen the will to say NO to sin.
- Prostration: which is an exercise of disciplining the body is also another spiritual exercise. Come let us kneel...is what we start the Prime Prayers with. Unfortunately prostration has gradually disappeared from our worship. Nonetheless bowing and kneeling to the ground is essential to practice lowliness and subjection to the Holy Spirit.
- Body posture in prayer: Teach us how to stand before You at the time of praying and offer you the appropriate doxology is what we ask God when we are about to pray the Midnight Prayers. Standing upright in a respectful manner is required while praying. It shows reverence and respect to the One we are praying to "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Timothy 2:8).
- Serving others: "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). This is our Lord's precept concerning true greatness.
- Consistency; St. Paul didn't waste his time aimlessly, and eliminating any confusing factors, he declared, "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air" (1 Corinthians 9:26), until he could boldly and successfully say: "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8).
- Perseverance: A brother questioned Abba Arsenius to hear a word of him and the old man said to him ‘ Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions” Abba Arsenius.
- Hold yourself accountable. When we surround ourselves with friends who have spiritual maturity, they will become a source of support and enhancement for spiritual growth and maturity. Your Father of Confession can hold you accountable. He can guide you spiritually
- Avoid Temptations; Stay away from anything that makes you trip.
- Trust in the Lord; Submit to the Holy Spirit who is the source of all virtues. Self-Control is a fruit of the Spirit. When I submit my flesh to the spirit and my spirit to the Spirit of God, I will have set my foot on the threshold of Self Control.

+ What motivates Self-Control?

- The best way to motivate us to have Self-Control is to consider our spiritual life as a marathon. To finish that marathon, you have to be very well trained, fit and on a clear schedule for exercising.
- That is exactly how St. Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 9, comparing a believer to an athlete who in his desire to win a race sets before his eyes a clear goal and that is winning the race.
- To achieve that, he controls his food, sleep, and amount of exercises. While an athlete does it for a perishable crown, we as Christians have our spiritual goal for an imperishable crown. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we



for an imperishable crown" (I Corinthians 9:24,25). Self Control is clearly a prerequisite for winning that imperishable crown lest we become disqualified.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.3: Substance Abuse

Building Block 5:
Discerning the
True Meaning of
Freedom



Objective

To understand the significance of Substance abuse as an enslavement that must be utterly avoided

Application

Cut off any inclination that may lead to any enslavement. Limit your hours for video games, be mindful of the danger of drugs, and cut off those that encourage you in its consumption, etc...

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Corinthians 6:12](#), [1 Corinthians 3:16](#), [Gal 5:1](#), [Song of Solomon 2:15](#), [Matthew 11:28](#), [Luke 15:23,24](#), [Isaiah 43:25](#), [John 4:13,14](#), [John 4:13,14](#), [Zechariah 2:8](#), [Genesis 39:9](#), [1 Corinthians 15:33](#), [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)



Liturgy: [Litany of the Sick](#)



Patristics: [Cyril of Alexandria. \(2007\). Commentary on the Twelve Prophets. Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators.](#)



Story: [Good Shepherd](#), [Joseph the righteous](#)



Other: [CAAM Articles](#), [Legacy SUS Curriculum G10 Filler Lesson](#), [American Psychiatric Association](#), [Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles](#); [Recovery from Marijuana Addiction \(English\)](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What is an addiction?

- Addiction is a bad habit which results in losing control over a specific behavior or drugs until the person becomes submissive to that habit's effect throughout his daily activities. St Paul explained "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." (1 Corinthians 6:12)
- There are different types of addiction;
- Substance use: displayed by compulsive substance use. People with Substance use disorder(SUD) have an intense focus on using a certain substance(s) such as alcohol, tobacco, or illicit drugs, to the point where the person's ability to function in day to day life becomes impaired.
- Behavioral addiction: is the failure to resist an impulse, drive, or temptation to perform an act that is harmful to the person or to others. Examples are internet, video game, pornography, sex, eating, gambling, and social media.
- Sin could be an addiction "People addicted to sin" Cyril of Alexandria.
- There are many consequences of addiction, whether Substance or Behavioral.
 - 1- Physical side effects; Change of sleep and/or appetite schedule, Headaches or chronic pain, Sweating, muscle tensions, Tightness in chest & shortness of breath, Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, Heart palpitation, infection of heart lining and valves, Liver and Kidney disease, Lung complications, including pneumonia, collapsed veins.
 - 2- Psychological side effects; Anxiety, Restless, Depression, Poor concentration, Irritability, Suicidal thoughts.
 - 3- Social side effects; Distancing oneself from relationships (divorce , loneliness), Aggressiveness, Failure in performing well at school or work.
 - 4- Spiritual side effects;
 - Destroying God's Temple (the addict body). "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)
 - Hindering a person's repentance.

- losing the True Freedom. Saint Paul exhorts us to remain steadfast in the freedom which Christ has bestowed upon us and not be entangled under the yoke of any kind of slavery. He said, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1).
- Separation from God by being enslaved to sin. Addiction is a compounded sin, since one sin leads to another. Addiction leads the addict to wicked and harmful friendships, stealing, fornication, and many other sins. The addict becomes a slave, who has lost all the spiritual values and moral principles. Addiction leads him from one sin to another.

+ Reasons behind addiction.

- Lack of parental supervision/Parental monitoring and support. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University reported that as of June 2011, 1.6 million high school students had substance abuse disorders involving nicotine, alcohol or other drugs. Of those who began smoking, drinking or using illegal drugs before the age of 18, one in four are addicted, compared to one in 25 who began to smoke, drink or use other drugs at age 21 or later. Parental supervision can play a role in whether teens use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.
- Trauma/family disagreements; The relationship between childhood trauma and susceptibility to addiction can be best understood when one knows how experience influences the brain's development. The growth of the brain and its eventual physical structure are significantly affected by one's experiences, both the positive and the negative.
- And while experience often leads to the brain developing in ways that are beneficial, experience can also be negative, which can impede or otherwise alter the brain's development. God is the only source of healing and overcoming the past. ‘Do you understand how the body of sin was destroyed? The urge for sin was condemned in the flesh; sin died first in Christ, then from him and through him grace has passed into us.’ Burns, J. P., Jr., Newman, C., & Wilken, R. L. (Eds.). (2012). Romans: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators. (J. P. Burns Jr. & C. Newman, Trans.) (p. 140). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- The feeling of emptiness and disconnection. There is no doubt that some young people suffer from all sorts of emptiness. Whether Emotional emptiness: Due to lack of one's sense of belonging. Or Physical emptiness: Due to a tendency to laziness, or isolation; not being involved in sports, social or recreational activities or any literary or artistic activities. “O Physician of the sick & forgiven of sins, who deliver from distress all those that come to You; O safe harbour from the tossing of the waves and their turmoil; show mercy upon them that are oppressed by diseases and preserve them from evil death” Litany of the Unction of the sick.
- Low self-Esteem; People with chronic self-esteem issues may take on behaviors that reinforce their feelings of inadequacy, including drug abuse because they believe they have little to live up to. When people use drugs or alcohol as an artificial boost to low self-esteem, they're attempting to function in situations where they lack confidence.
- Experimenting; Curiosity to try something new. Many teens begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol simply because they are curious and want to know what it feels like. As teenagers, they have the delusion that they are invincible. Here comes the importance of Self-Control. Solomon the wise says “Catch is the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines.” (Song of Solomon 2:15)
- Peer pressure. This peer pressure happens most often between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, when teenagers begin to think “everyone else is doing it,” so they should too.
- Idle time that pushes the person to consume time in destructive behavior. One of the most common reasons that teenagers begin experimenting with drugs and alcohol is that they are simply bored and have no deeper interests. They see drugs and alcohol as a pastime to be explored.

+ How to protect from/treat Addiction?

- Hold oneself accountable. The church has a leading role: the youth may see the sons of Christ, inside the church, as blessed examples, whether they be monks, clergy or marrying laity convincing him or her that it is quite possible to live with God and stick to values. Father of Confession is a great example of someone to hold the addict accountable spiritually & can guide him to the right direction for treatment (if needed).
- Don't look back; Submit the past to God. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28) . In the Prodigal Son's story, the father was waiting eagerly for the son & when he returned the Father celebrated “Let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15:23,24). God is waiting for the repentance of the addict regardless of their condition. “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25)
- Trust in The Lord; God is the only fulfilling source for mankind. The Samaritan woman was in deep need. Jesus was the only one who fulfilled her needs. “Jesus answered and said to her, “whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:13,14). Trusting the Lord leads to rest & peace. It gives a great & true sense of acceptance.
- Remember the value of mankind in God's eyes; The Good Shepherd left the 99 sheep and went to find the lost one. God cares for everyone.



“See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;” (John 4:13,14) “for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.” (Zechariah 2:8)

- Self-Control; <Refer to the previous lesson> Big part of prevention from addiction is to avoid it. A youth should have discernment to know what's right & what's wrong and also a strong will to say “No” to the wrong choices. That skill develops by getting closer to God & His commandments & allowing the Holy Spirit to work. “THE CLOSER I AM TO GOD, THE FARTHER AWAY I AM FROM ADDICTION” Priest George Maximov. Joseph the Righteous had discerned “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Joseph had God in front of him all the time.
- Choose Friends wisely; Peer pressure has a tremendous effect on youth. So choosing close friends is crucial. St. Paul said “Don not be deceived; “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1 Corinthians 15:33)
- Time management; When a youth is busy with good edifying things to do, there will be no time for distractions. As St. Paul said “he who is idle let him not eat”(2 Thessalonians 3:10). Also Abba Anthony the great in his early monastic life, an angel of the Lord appeared to him teaching him how to manage his time between praying, working, reading...
- Addicts need medical treatment in order to become rid of their biological dependence on the drug; this is called ‘detoxification.’ The addict also needs psychological and social care so that he may once more become a normal person, both psychologically and socially. The most critical and effective factor in the treatment of addicts, however, is the desire of the addict himself to be cured and do away with addiction. There are multiple of Christian programs that fight addiction. “The Program for a Better Life”, “Triumphant Christian Church”

- + It is encouraged to prepare a workshop with each breakout group discussing a different type of addiction. Provide them with a type, have them discuss among themselves, how such an addiction could arise and how/when it can be harmful socially, physically/spiritually. If you develop a worksheet please [submit it](#). If you have experience in the domain, please submit your feedback and additions.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.4: Overcoming Temptation

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Objective

To understand how to respond to temptation and what to do; lessons from temptation of Jesus

Application

Repeat to yourself frequently the verse "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps 119:11). Make sure alongside this exercise, you read His word.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Genesis 22:16 - 18](#), [Deuteronomy 8:1 - 2](#), [John 8:44](#), [Genesis 3:1-5](#), [2 Corinthians 11:3](#), [Matthew 4](#), [1 Peter 5:8](#), [Luke 22:28](#), [Hebrews 2:18](#), [4:15](#), [1 John 2:15-16](#), [Galatians 5:19 - 21](#), [James 1:14 - 15](#), [Ephesians 6:11-12](#), [James 4:7](#), [1 Corinthians 2:11](#), [Matthew 4:4](#), [Philippians 4:6-7](#)



Liturgy: [The Confession](#).



Patristics: [Homily 13 on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom](#); [St. Anthony the Great](#)



Story: [Jesus' Temptation on the mountain](#), [Abraham & Isaac](#), [Adam & Eve](#), [King David](#)



Other: [Fighting Temptation HG Bishop Youssef](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + The [Marshmallow Test](#) *<consider a discussion on temptation>* Here are some possible questions:
 - This is a cute video about kids trying to avoid a silly temptation. What serious temptations do you think people your age face today?
 - Is temptation about choosing between bad things and good things, or something more than that? Are there always clear answers?
 - How does our faith help us when we face tough decisions?
 - How is God a part of your everyday decision-making?
 - "This is the great work of man: always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath." St. Anthony the Great, said to Abba Poeman
- + What is Temptation?
 - Temptation is the desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise.
 - In other words, Temptation is a pressure applied to your thinking, designed to create wrong emotions which will eventually lead to wrong actions.
 - The purpose of temptation is to entice a person to sin by breaking God's laws and commandments. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)
 - Temptation is different from Trial. Trial occurs when God brings events into someone's life in order to reveal their character. God directly tested Abraham by commanding he sacrifice his son Isaac in order to determine if he would be fully obedient to his word. Abraham's passing of the test proved he was worthy to not only be the father of countless generations but also to have them bless the entire world "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, blessing i will bless you, and multiplying i will multiply your descendants as the starts of th heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:16-18)! God also tested ancient Israel for FORTY years, while they wandered the desert before entering the promised land, in order to determine their level of obedience. "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. 2 And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years



in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” (Deuteronomy 8:1 - 2).

- Temptation is primarily based on deception. This is why a fallen Lucifer, the universe's first sinner and chief promoter of disobedience, is called the "Father of lies" (John 8:44). His hardness against the Godhead and dogmatic belief in the superiority of his own thoughts caused him to commit spiritual suicide. "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3). Satan led Eve, in the Garden of Eden, into disbelieving God by both lying to her and appealing to human nature's desire for power (Genesis 3:1 - 5). Lucifer tempted King David to sin by leading him to trust in his own strength and number his army. The deceiver was also allowed to provide regular temptation to Christ not just before his public ministry began (Matthew 4), but also throughout his earthly life. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

+ Sources of Temptation; There are three sources of Temptation;

- World; indifference and opposition to God's design. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 John 2:15).
- Flesh; Gluttony and sexual immorality."Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: [a]adultery, [b]fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, [c]murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21)
- Devil; a real personal enemy. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:11-12)
- Whether it comes from the devil or arises out of our own desires, the goal of temptation is always to lead us to sin. God will never directly lead us into any disobedience.

+ Sin's equation; Sin = Desire + Opportunity + Action.

- Overcoming Temptation is the process of cleaning out a desire and/or staying away from opportunities to sin and/or controlling oneself against temptation.
- Defeating the desire; To defeat Temptation, one must either remove the desire or control His environment. On the temptation on the mount, when Christ was tempted 3 times by the devil, each time we saw that Christ's true desire was to please His Father. Thus, to clean out a desire to sin, one must first feed His desire for God so that it exceeds and defeats the desire for sin. "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)
- Removing the opportunity; It is not enough to only pray asking God to deliver you from sin (especially ones of addictive nature); you need to do your part in the fight against sin and distance yourself from the cause of this sin.

+ How to overcome Temptation?

- Trust in the Lord. "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:18). "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)
- Analyzing the sources of temptation (the World, The Devil, Myself) "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 2:11)
- Replace the bad desire with Godly one. Moreover, get fed with Godly desires to leave no opportunity for bad desires. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)
- Grow in Purity: one must confess and cleanse Himself regularly that he may not get used to sin and no longer feel the effects of temptation. "Lead us not into temptation, nor let any iniquity rule over us, but deliver us from worthless works and from the thoughts, motions, sights, and touches thereof. Destroy the tempter and drive him away from us. Rebuke also his movements implanted in us and cut off from us the impulses which drag us into sin." (The Confession Prayer)
- Know the Word of God; one can defeat temptation with knowledge of scripture rooted in one's love for God, as Christ quoted scripture in each of the temptations. "But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)



- Fight against sin; "Yea, for therefore you took up arms, not to be idle, but to fight. For this cause neither does God hinder the temptations as they come on, first to teach you that you have become much stronger; next, that you may continue modest neither be exalted even by the greatness of your gifts, the temptations having power to repress you; moreover, in order that that wicked demon, who is for a while doubtful about your desertion of him, by the touchstone of temptations may be well assured that you have utterly forsaken and fallen from him; fourthly, that you may in this way be made stronger, and better tempered than any steel; fifthly, that you may obtain a clear demonstration of the treasures entrusted to you." Homily 13 on Matthew by St. John Chrysostom.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.5: Importance and power of obedience

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Objective

To understand the importance of obedience and its power

Application

Attempt to look at receiving every command during the next month as a command from God Himself. And do it without hesitation.

Look for the reasons behind disobedience & try to tackle them.

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Peter 2:13](#), [Romans 8:21](#), [Hebrew 12:6-11](#), [Acts 5:29](#), [Philippians 2:8](#), [1 Peter 5:10](#), [Hebrew 12:11](#), [Galatians 5:17-18](#), [John 14:21-24](#), [Philippians 4:6-9](#), [Psalm 16:11](#), [Isaiah 41:10](#), [Romans 5:19](#), [Isaiah 1:19](#), [Deuteronomy 11:26-28](#).



Liturgy: [Baptism Commandment to Adults/Children](#)



Patristics: [The Philokalia](#), [Christian Morality](#)



Story: [Adam & Eve](#), The Salvation Story



[St Mary's Coptic Orthodox church Chicago](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What Is Obedience?

- Obedience is compliance with an order, request, law or submission to another's authority. In simple words Obedience is behavior that's respectful and mindful of rules and laws.
- In the Orthodox spiritual tradition, obedience is a basic virtue: obedience to the Lord, to the Gospel, to the Church, to the leaders of the Church, to one's parents and elders, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). There is no spiritual life without obedience, no freedom or liberation from sinful passions and lusts. To submit to God's discipline in all of its human forms, is the only way to obtain "because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).
- God disciplines us as His children out of His great love for us. "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives. you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrew 12:6-11). Our obedience to God's commandments and discipline is the exclusive sign of our love for Him and His Son.
- It's a commandment; "We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Adam's sin was the lack of obedience, and it has no cure except for the Son to obey the Father. The obedience of the Son to the Father gives man power to obey. Christ emptied Himself from everything to obey the Father, thus He gave these qualities to us as inheritance just as He gave us His body, blood, love, and humility as inheritance. Included in this inheritance he gave us His obedience. The Holy Spirit extends to us this obedience, and he who is filled with the Holy Spirit is able to obey.
- "The truly intelligent man pursues one sole objective: to obey and conform to the God of all. With this single aim in view, he disciplines his soul, and whatever he may encounter in the course of his life, he gives thanks to God for the compass and depth of His providential ordering of all things. For it is absurd to be grateful to doctors who give us bitter and unpleasant medicines to cure our bodies, and yet to be ungrateful to God for what appears to us to be harsh, not grasping that all we encounter is for our benefit and in accordance with His providence. For knowledge of God and faith in Him is the salvation and perfection of the soul." St. Anthony the Great, The Philokalia

+ The Sacrifice of Obedience;

- To be obedient is to give up my own will and to submit to a different and an external will. In other words, I don't carry out my will but the will of someone else even if I don't agree with or may be against my own will. The Church Fathers call obedience "severing the will", that is to say, one would give up his own will to obey the voice of God. This is where the expression "the sacrifice of obedience" comes from, it means that I sacrifice my own will to obey my beloved Jesus, do His will, and to follow His commandments.
- This relates precisely to building a will that produces self-control which in turn helps defeat temptations and preserves our freedom (reviewing elements of the block). Obedience is a spiritual tool at our disposal.

+ Challenges of Obedience:

- Lack of Love; Without love man cannot obey, but through love he can sacrifice all his personal desires to obey Christ. Love is the foundation, and he whose heart is full of love, will be able to obey easily with content no matter how difficult the matter is, meditate upon His cross, His love, the word of His Gospel, and contemplate on His work with you and His care for you. Then your heart will be filled with His love and you will find yourself easily obeying His commandment.
- Pride is one of the biggest challenges to obeying God. In order to obey God, the Lord Jesus had to vacate His position and standing with God, and took the place of a servant. Certainly, obeying God comes at a cost. Having the mind of Christ is the key to obeying God and overcoming pride regardless of your possession, achievement and social status). "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8)
- Suffering is another challenge to obeying God. When we walk in obedience to God we may suffer the loss of some comfort and convenience. In His obedience to God, Jesus suffered the death on the cross. If obeying God is our greatest delight than any suffering that comes in our effort to obey God will not deter us. Let's remember that the reward of obedience is always far more greater than the losses. "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (1 Peter 5:10). Therefore, when your obedience is challenged by any perceived or real suffering, do not give up, you may be a step away from a great victory. "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrew 12:11)
- Fleshly Lusters; Our flesh is in constant conflict with our spirit. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." (Galatians 5:17-18)

+ Benefits of Obedience:

- The Father's Love; "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.... If a man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14:21-24).
- The Grace of the Holy Spirit: But as we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from within, we grow in holiness. This is the process of sanctification, which can also be described as spiritual growth. The more we read God's Word, spend time with Jesus, and allow the Holy Spirit to change us from within, the more we grow in obedience and holiness as Christians: "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart! They also do no iniquity; They walk in His ways. You have commanded us To keep Your precepts diligently. Oh, that my ways were directed To keep Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, When I look into all Your commandments. I will praise You with uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments. I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly!" (Psalm 119:1-8)
- "Thus also we who are baptized, having wiped off the sins which obscure the light of the Divine Spirit, have the eye of the spirit free, unimpeded, and full of light, by which alone we contemplate the Divine, the Holy Spirit flowing down to us from above." Clement of Alexandria - The Instructor - Chapter VI
- Blessings; Obeying God gives multiple blessings.
 - Peace; "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:6-9).
 - Obeying God gives Joy; "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures



forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11).

■ Obeying God gives strength; “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10).

■ We were made righteous through obedience; “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19)

- Obeying God is both the key to a deeper walk with God, and living in His blessings. “If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the fruit of the land” (Isaiah 1:19). God’s promises and blessings to us depend largely on our obedience to Him. Deuteronomy 11:26–28 sums it up like this: “Obey and you will be blessed. Disobey and you will be cursed.”

+ The call for obedience:

- In the service of baptism, the catechumen (meaning anyone of us who has been baptised), is called before God to : "guard yourself and do not go to unsuitable places, so that the Lord may guard you from Satanic temptations. Cultivate inside you beautiful qualities. Plant within you righteousness and praise. Pour inside your purity. Plant within you obedience, love and holiness. Plant within you compassion, charity and justice."
- We can obey because we have to. Slaves obey their masters because they have to.
- We can obey because we need to. Employees obey because they need to.
- We can obey because we want to. Believers Obey God because they want to.



Theme: Christian Discernment

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Lesson 5.6: St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life

Objective

While youth may be surrounded or thinking of dating, youth are reminded the purpose of a relationship is a godly centered marriage.

Application

God has given us families to support us, guide us in our choices and help us in times of troubles. The Bible tells us to obey our parents, Ephesians 6:1.
Examining our thoughts and actions toward your family.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Mark 10:9](#), [Genesis 1:27-28](#), [Matt 19:4](#), [Genesis 2:24](#), [Colossians 3:14](#), [Genesis 14:14](#), [Ephesians 5:22](#), [Ephesians 5:25](#), [Ephesian 6:1-2](#)



Liturgy: [The Prayer of the Wedding Commitment](#), [The declaration Prayer in the Sacrament of Matrimony](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom on Marriage and Family Life](#), [Homily 21 St. John Chrysostom](#), [Homily 12 on Colossians](#)



Story: Abraham's Family.



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Marriage is a Holy Sacrament.

- Jesus taught the uniqueness of human marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God's love for men, and of his own love for the Church. In the sacrament of marriage (The Matrimony), a man and a woman are given the possibility to become one spirit and one flesh in a way which no human love can provide by itself. "Now also, our Master, be a mediator for the groom and his helpmate, adjoin (...) and (...) through the pledge of fellowship, and grant them the sign of their union, so so that through the bond of love, they may be unified in harmony" (The Prayer of the Wedding Commitment)
- Marriage is a great mystery; as St. John Chrysostom explained, in his homily on Marriage & Family life, that when the man leaves his parents & joins his wife is like Jesus when He became man "left His Father's Glory" to join & save humanity "His bride". "I speak regarding Christ, that having left the Father, He came down, and came to the Bride, and became one Spirit. For he that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit. I Corinthians 6:17 And well says he, it is a great mystery." St. John Chrysostom
- Marriage is Holy & blessed by God; "Yea, a marriage it is, not of passion, nor of the flesh, but wholly spiritual, the soul being united to God by union unspeakable, and which He alone knows. Therefore he says, He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. (I Corinthians 6:17).... St. John Chrysostom
- There's nothing wrong or shameful in marriage; as St John Chrysostom said "if marriage were a thing to be condemned, would he have called Christ and the Church a bride and bridegroom." In Isaiah 54:5: "For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel, He is called the God of the whole earth." St. John Chrysostom
- Sex is holy within the marriage. It's like a fire, it's very beneficial as long as it's in a fireplace but it's very dangerous & harmful outside the fireplace. God created & designed sex to be fruitful and blessed mankind with it. Sex in the way God designed it is a blessing. The way God designed sex is to be between a man & a woman with in marriage. "In the name of our Lord God, and savior, Jesus Christ, the founder of the Statute of perfection and the author of the law of grace, we declare in this orthodox assembly and before the altar of the Lord of host the union of possession and the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son (...) to his betrothed, the blessed Orthodox daughter (...). The declaration Prayer in the Sacrament of Matrimony

+ Marriage is a Union (Covenant) between Man, Woman & God.

- Marriage is union between the husband & the wife united by God Himself. "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." Mark 10:9 "We ask You, also, now O our King, to join Your two servants (...) and (...) to be united to each other in one body, and to enter into the law of joy, and to abide in Your truthful teachings." The First Matrimonial Prayer

- Marriage is a covenant between Husband & Wife just as between God & the Church as God created & blessed it. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Genesis 1:27-28. "He which made them from the beginning, made them male and female" Matt 19:4*
- Marriage is an unbreakable covenant bound with Love. God is Love. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, God unites the husband & the wife to be one flesh. *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" Genesis 2:24. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:14*

+ Getting to know someone (Christian dating) is intended to discern the qualities of a future spouse.

You may discuss the timing of dating and how, at this time in their life, there are too many altering factors that cannot help them properly discern the ideal qualities of a spouse. At this stage, most youth date for experience, which is an unorthodox concept that simply trains towards a lifestyle promoting divorces.

- St John Chrysostom focuses more on the internal beauty which is the soul.
- "Let us seek in a wife affectionateness, modest-mindedness, gentleness, these are the characteristics of beauty."
- "Let us not look for wealth, nor for that high-birth which is outward, but for that true nobility which is in the soul"

+ Marriage is a small church.

- Family is the building block of the Church. "If we thus regulate our own houses, we shall be also fit for the management of the Church. For indeed a house is a little Church." St John Chrysostom. A biblical example of a great family is "Abraham, Sarah & Isaac" "Consider Abraham, and Sarah, and Isaac, and the three hundred and eighteen born in his house. How the whole house was harmoniously knit together, how the whole was full of piety and fulfilled the Apostolic injunction. St. John Chrysostom. Sarah honored Abraham & used to call him "My lord". Abraham loved Sarah dearly & obeyed her commandments. Even the 318 servants who were born in the house of Abraham, didn't hesitate to risk their lives & go to war with Abraham. *"Now when Abraham heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan"* Genesis 14:14. "When husband and wife and children and servants are all interested in the same things, great is the harmony of the house. St. John Chrysostom
- For the wives; *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord"* Ephesians 5:22. St. John Chrysostom elaborated on this saying "Because when they are in harmony, the children are well brought up, and the domestics are in good order, and neighbors, and friends, and relations enjoy the fragrance." St. John Chrysostom
- For the husbands; *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,"* Ephesians 5:25. Also St John Chrysostom said if the wives were asked to obey & to submit to the husbands as to the Lord, the husbands also should love their wives as Christ loves the Church "You have seen the measure of obedience, hear also the measure of love. Would you have your wife obedient unto you, as the Church is to Christ? Take then yourself the same provident care for her, as Christ takes for the Church." St. John Chrysostom
- For Children; *"Children, Obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise"* Ephesians 6:1-2

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 5.7: An Open Discussion: Review and Q&A

Building Block 5:
Discerning the True
Meaning of Freedom



Objective

Exposing any remaining misconceptions on freedom.

Application

Review some of the applications of the building block and if they did them or not and if they benefited. Encourage them to continue some of these exercises

References and Resources



Scripture: As used in previous lessons of the Building block.



Liturgy: Review one or many of the building block quotes.



Patristics: Review one or many of the building block quotes.



Story: Review one or many of the building block stories.



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Review the Major impacts of sources and impacts on Freedom as presented through the building block.
 - What is Freedom? World vs. Christian?
 - Does my life with God restrain my free will?
 - How to attain freedom? Abide in His Word > Be His disciples > Know the Truth > Made Free
 - Self-Control preserves our freedom.
 - Spiritual life is like a marathon. It needs Self-Control (discipline) to win it.
 - Substance abuse enslave a person & steal their freedom.
 - What are the reasons behind addiction?
 - Consequences & side effects of addiction.
 - The Sin equation and how this helps us fight sin and which in turn preserves our freedom.
 - How does obedience relate to freedom? Benefits of obedience
 - What are the challenges of obedience?
 - How does marriage and Family life help our war for freedom?
 - Sex is holy within the marriage.
- + Choose an application to practice in the next month.
 - Evaluate things that could chain you & discuss it with Fr. of confession.
 - Discuss with your Fr. of confession how to practice Self-Control.
 - Cut off any inclination that may lead you to any enslavement.
 - Practice reading the Bible every day & repeat to yourself “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” Ps 119:11
 - Attempt to obey every command as if it's from God Himself.
 - Look for reasons of disobedience and tackle them.
 - Examine your thoughts. Why do you think God designed sex in a covenant marital relationship?
- + Prepare an open discussion on Freedom and their perspective on it now that the building block is done



Building Block 6: Discerning the Pathway to a Better Life

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.I: Nourishment and Growth through Scriptural readings

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To understand that the word of God is our nourishment and introduce how to read the bible to truly benefit and grow.

Application

Have your own personal Bible that you can write in it and mark it up with notes and thoughts. When you look back at it, you can reflect on that time when you read that chapter or verse.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ephesians 6:11](#), [Ephesians 6:17](#), [Matthew 4:1-12](#), [Jeremiah 15:16](#), [Psalms 119:103-105](#), [Acts 8:31](#)



Liturgy: [The Liturgy of the Word](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom, Homily XIX on book of Acts](#), [St. Ephraim the Syrian](#), [St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies](#)



Story: [St. Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch](#); [Jesus](#)



Other: Fr. Daoud Lamie App [App Store](#), [Google Play](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The word of God is:

- Weapon in our warfare

- St. Paul in Ephesians said *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil”* Ephesians 6:11. Then he explained what is the armor of God and said *“and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God”* Ephesians 6:17.
- So the word of God is one of the main weapons of the Armor of God. It protects from the wiles of the devil. That was very clear in the Lord's temptation on the mountain (Matthew 4:1-12).
- Every time the devil would tempt Jesus, He would answer with the scripture. The word of God is a powerful weapon. We should use scripture as the foundation of our lives and speech.

- Nourishment to the soul

- Scripture is one of the most vital ‘foods’ that the soul will nourish itself on. It is the word of God that sustains the mind and will of the human being.
- *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.”* Jeremiah 15:16.
- Also in the Psalms *“How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*
- Psalms 119:103. We should therefore be acquainted and even memorize scripture that we may be guarded by its valuable teachings.
- That's what the Church prepares in every Liturgy. There are five readings from the bible in every Liturgy for the Church understands the power of the word of God and how beneficial & nourishing to the congregation.

- Light & Guidance

- *“Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”* Psalms 119:104-105. The word of God gives understanding & guidance.
- Being inspired by those it speaks of as heroes, learning from the lessons found within it, and finding life in it's very words and teachings – specifically the life and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as handed down to us in the Gospels.
- We need to observe to do all that is found within the Bible. Seeing the Bible as the standard of our lives and actions, the very inspiration of how we ought to live.
- It was said about Jesus that He, *“increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”* (Luke 2:52). He spent time in the Temple, *“sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished*

at His understanding and answers.” (Luke 2:46-47)

- Not a one time show
 - The Bible is not a novel that we read once and say we're done, I've read it. No matter how many times we read over the same scriptural passages and stories, that the Holy Spirit will speak something new to us that we are in need of hearing.
 - No matter how many times we approach it, we are convicted with a new message or at least reminded of what we may have forgotten.
 - “It is not possible, I say not possible, ever to exhaust the mind of the Scriptures. It is a well which has no bottom.” (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XIX on book of Acts)
- + ABC Bible; How to read the Bible;
 - 1. Have a spiritual guide:
 - The scripture itself tells us that we need someone to unlock for us the mysteries found within.
 - When St Philip the apostle saw the Ethiopian Eunuch reading scripture alone, he asked him, Do you understand what you are reading? The Eunuch replied “*How can I, unless someone guides me?*” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:31)”
 - Therefore we also need guidance and support when we start reading the Bible and want to understand it.
 - 2. Devote the right time to reading the Bible.
 - Most people will attempt reading right before going to bed. At the end of a long day, you are usually the most tired, your mind is exhausted and all you want to do is sleep.
 - Try reading at a time when you are refreshed like before eating or studying. Or even in the morning before starting your day. But be consistent and devote that time every day.
 - 3. Your reading needs to be about quality and not quantity.
 - The Bible needs to be read carefully with the intention of having an impact on your life. Not to be read as a textbook or any fictional book that you just need to finish.
 - A single chapter a day of focused and intentional reading is often much better than the sprinting through of a dozen chapters where we retain nothing.
 - You need to take the time to read, to write notes, to meditate and ask questions to your Spiritual Guides.
 - Refer to your spiritual guide for what and how much to read.
 - 4. Finally, don't just read, but study scripture.
 - Father Tadros Malaty has written commentaries on almost every book in the Bible and has packed them with historical and contextual facts, spiritual meditations, as well as Early Church Patristic commentary.
 - Help educate them on how to locate proper resources of studies.

+ Let me grow

Consider discussing what is a cafeteria Christian and at what times can man tend to pick a choose scripture as fits them? [Social Right movements, Things that may seem unclear in Scripture, etc...] We cannot pick and choose, or even reject what we like or don't like in Scripture.

- As we mentioned earlier, the word of God is nourishment to the soul. It's essential for spiritual growth. Commit & take it seriously.
- We pick a healthy diet & stick to it just for the sake of being in shape or building muscles. Same with our spiritual health, we have to be consistent and committed to a healthy spiritual growth.
- Reading the Bible daily is very beneficial. Also understanding & applying the scripture to our daily lives will boost our spiritual health. When you begin to read or listen to the Holy Scriptures, pray to God thus: “Lord Jesus Christ, open the ears and eyes of my heart so that I may hear Thy words and understand them, and may fulfill Thy will.”
- Always pray to God like this, that He might illumine your mind and open to you the power of His words. Many, having trusted in their own reason, have turned away into deception.” (St. Ephraim the Syrian).
- Let us seek a serious and committed relationship with the word of God and let us pray and ask that the Holy Spirit may speak to us and open our hearts and minds to receive and keep the words of Scripture that we may live by them all the days of our life.
- Stand on a solid foundation. Scripture is indeed the solid ground and pillar on which we establish everything. We cannot pick and choose, or even reject what we like or don't like in Scripture.
- As Christians we are called to both accept and understand the cumulative message of the entirety of Scripture. “...By the will of God, [the evangelists] handed the gospel down to us in the Scriptures – to be the ground and pillar of our faith.” (St. Irenaeus, Against Heresies)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.2: Facing Our Daily Challenges: Depression, Loneliness

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

Addressing: Loneliness, Depression, Friendships

Application

Contemplate on why we rely on things of this world other than God to fill our loneliness. Know that it is okay to have mental health issues and it is nothing to be embarrassed about. It is important to let your parents or a servant know so that they can help you find both medical and spiritual support.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Proverbs 13:12, 18:14; Job 7:6; Ephesians 6:11-12; Matthew 11:28-30; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:15-16](#)



Liturgy: [Litany of the Sick](#)



Patristics: [St. Pope Kyrillos VI](#), [St. Anthony the Great](#)



Story: [Elijah](#)



Other: [HG Bishop Youssef Q&A on Depression](#); [My Black Dog, World Health Organization](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What You Resist, Persists

Consider reading Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19 before beginning the lesson. Ask: What was Elijah dealing with in this story?

- There is no way to completely avoid all psychological stress, but there are ways to deal with it.
- Do you procrastinate facing the things that distress you? Do you avoid discussing problems? How do you deal with distress, pain & depression? Do you know your worth?
- Like a rolling snowball, our problems will only get bigger if we do not face them. As such, it is critical to avoid numbing activities such as large amounts of time with TV, social media, video games, etc.
- Look for the underlying causes of your depression and sense of loneliness.
- Have a menu of self-care habits and know how to nourish yourself mentally and spiritually. Pray for God's wisdom on how to deal with it.

+ Signs and Symptoms of Medical Depression:

- Swinging mood: This reflects a persistent and pervasive unhappy mood rather than the transient and situation (specific mood typical of adolescence and puberty). Changed mood may project a global anger that interferes with interpersonal relationships.
- Low self-esteem: Results in feelings of unworthiness, guilt, and rejection; leads to behaviors that "set up" failure and rejection.
- Decreased energy: Marked by extreme fatigue that is incapacitating at times; the person may "wake up tired", which leads to concern about possible underlying illness.
- Problems with school involvement: Academic performance and social activity, low grades or decrease in academic performance can provide markers of emotional difficulty, changes in interpersonal relationships, social isolation and withdrawal.
- Somatic Complaints: Symptoms usually fall within 3 categories: physical complaints with fatigue, alterations in sleep patterns, and changes in appetite and body weight.
- It is ok to be sad or upset with a certain situation that has happened to you. If you're bullied in school, someone you love has died, a friend has hurt you or you didn't do well on a test. These are momentary times of sadness and don't lead to depression.

+ Mental illnesses Have Many Forms

- Mental illness can include: anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, PTSD, personality disorders, and even eating disorders. Many of these are real illnesses that require immediate attention.
- Nevertheless, our social and cultural norms have sometimes created a negative perception of those who come out and confess that they suffer from such illnesses. We as Christians need to come together and address this all too often neglected subject because after all, this affects us all.

- Some may believe that because we are part of the Church, and that because we are a strong faith based community, that we are somehow immune to all this. This is not true at all.
- In order to resolve the situation, we begin with awareness and then we must move towards encouraging all those who are suffering to seek healing, both spiritual as well as through the medical world.
- The Church teaches us that part of God's great gift to humanity is our capacity for medical advancement. Seeking medical help is not insulting to God but part of the treatment can be spiritual in nature. Our faith very clearly supports and encourages all those who suffer from depression or loneliness to pursue both therapy and medicinal treatment if need be. In addition, as Christians we trust that all true healing is granted to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

+ Positive Impacts of a Strong Spiritual Life in the Battle against Mental Illness

- When a person strengthens their spiritual state and begins to address certain behavioral and cognitive habits, they can then grow closer to preparing the way for healing.
- A great example of this is the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." When this prayer is prayed repeatedly in times of anxiety, it not only helps a person cope with their medical condition but also allows them to raise their heart to God.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ said, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus Christ tells us to place our burdens onto Him and He will help us along with medical care and help.
- "As for us, too, O Lord, the sicknesses of our souls, heal; and also those of our bodies cure. O You, the True Physician of our souls and bodies, the Bishop of all flesh, visit us with Your salvation.... For You are He who loosens the bound and lifts up the fallen, the hope of those who have no hope, and the helper of those who have no helper, the comfort of the fainthearted, and the harbor of those in the storm." -Litany of the Sick.
- Elijah was depressed and God ministered to him in his troubles (1 Kings 19)

+ The Potential Tie Between Sin and Mental Illness

- Depression can sometimes be traced back to sins such as greed, laziness, sloth, apathy, and fear. Working on these sins through fasting, prayer, repentance and confession can help cleanse your spirit of these sins and can help prevent you from going down the path of depression and loneliness.
- Consuming your time with prayer, meditation, reading the Bible, listening to sermons all help strengthen your mind and spirit and you won't have time for sins in your life.
- *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:6-7)
- We need to rely on the strength and peace that our Lord Jesus Christ gives us to help us through our day to day struggles. Yes we need to seek medical attention for our physical and mental health but we must also strengthen our spiritual health which can help our physical and mental healing.
- We need to surround ourselves with positive and good friends, spiritual friends, family members that love and care for us and our Lord Jesus Christ to help us through the struggles of our lives and when we feel sad
- "The greatest relief is afforded by the mere communication of these troubles to one another." - William Rivers, MD.
- "...it is absurd to be grateful to doctors who give us bitter and unpleasant medicines to cure our bodies, and yet to be ungrateful to God for what appears to us to be harsh, not grasping that all we encounter is for our benefit and in accordance with His providence. For knowledge of God and faith in Him is the salvation and perfection of the soul." St. Anthony the Great
- "There are no bad days and good days, but there are days of prayer and days without prayer." -St. Pope Kyrillos VI

+ Recovery

- Continue to put God first and make the knowledge of Jesus Christ a goal in your life.
- It is said, *"For after all these things the Gentiles seek, for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and these things shall be added unto you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:32-34).
- Daily Holy Bible readings are a continuous remedy to depression. *"I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 3:13-14).
- A depressed person should know never to give up. This is part of the treatment. *"Let us not grow weary while doing good for in due season we*



shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

- When we keep in perspective that we do everything for the Lord Jesus Christ and not for our own selfish motives, depression will disappear, and we will find true happiness. *"According to my earnest expectations and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed but that with all boldness as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:20-21).*
- At times, combining professional counseling alongside spiritual guidance is encouraged and recommended.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.3: Chastity

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To understand the discipline and advantage of Chastity.

Application

Beware of what you see, what you hear, and you associate with. Keep your mind pure and include God in every part of your day. The only way to remain pure, especially today, is to spend time in His Word. The only way to weed out all the impurities that fill our hearts every day is to spend time reading God's Word.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Proverbs 6:20](#); [Matthew 5:27-30](#); [Matthew 15:19](#); [1 Corinthians 10:8](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#); [Psalm 51:10](#)



Liturgy: [The marital blessing during a wedding ceremony](#)



Patristics: ["St. Ephrem the Syrian"](#)



Story: [Noah's time, Sodom & Gomorrah](#)



Other: [Purity and chastity are very serious topics, What is the Coptic Orthodox Church's view on Sex and Sexuality?; Purity and Intimacy](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What does chastity mean?

Consider beginning with a discussion of what the students think chastity is. Write the word on the board or a large piece of paper, where everyone can see it. After a brief discussion, introduce the Merriam-Webster definition and discuss what that means.

- Merriam Webster dictionary definition is: The quality or state of being chaste: such as
- abstaining from unlawful sexual relationship
- abstaining from sexual relationships
- purity in conduct and intentions
- Restraint and simplicity in design and expression

+ A Pure Teen? Impossible, Odd, Weird, Abnormal.

- Today's society makes it very hard for teens to be pure, they are judged and looked on as being weird or not normal. The struggle for teens is real, they hear at church the importance of abstaining and how God blesses those that live a pure life, then they go to school, work or even hang out with friends and they begin to question all that they have learned.
- It is very true that modern society says we should "be ourselves" and to do whatever we feel like.
- However, Orthodox Christianity teaches us that we are most ourselves when we don't allow temptation to enslave us. While the struggle against any sexual activity outside of marriage is a difficult one, those who wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven enter by the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13).

+ Why is it important to stay pure?

- We need to be strong in our faith and follow the teachings of the Holy Bible. These teachings are from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and we can't deny what He has taught us about Chastity and staying pure.
- What your moral values are is important to you and will be important to your life partner down the road. You never want to have regrets and say "what if I didn't do..."
- Fitting in now isn't as important as what is to come when you seek your life partner. It may be hard to see that now, but it will be very clear as you progress in your life.
- An evil thought dwelt upon soon becomes a habit, and habits form character.
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's) are a big risk too.
- The emotional attachment that accompanies sexual activity is too often minimized.



- And “Every man who loves purity and chastity becomes the temple of God.” St. Ephrem the Syrian
 - The person who is in right relationship with God is to live a life of purity (2 Timothy 2:21-22; Titus 1:15 and have a pure heart—Matthew 5:8; 1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 9:14; James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22).
 - Purity is also listed among virtues (2 Corinthians 6:6; Philippians 4:8; 1 Timothy 4:12; compare Mark 7:15).
 - Immorality leads to destruction, (Share the story of Noah and Sodom and Gomorrah)
- + How are teens to “live in the world but not of the world” (John 17:14-16)?
- The desires within should be pure and we need to sanctify our desires.
 - If you allow good, pure and Holy desires to come through your senses (sight, thoughts, hearing things) then you can overcome the temptations of the world.
 - Avoid any sinful opportunities like bad videos (porn, music videos, etc), friends that don't practice chastity.
 - We need to practice self control and discipline. A great example is fasting. When you want to eat something when you can't, it strengthens your spiritual life which can help you live a pure life and a life of chastity.
 - Chastity is the virtue we struggle towards as we combat lusts of all sorts. We can learn so much from the lives of saints who have successfully fought against lust.
 - Purity doesn't just happen, and the heat of the moment isn't the time to decide your boundaries (Proverbs 14:15; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Lamentations 3:40).
 - Some examples from the Bible are the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah and the time of Noah. In both stories/times, people were not practicing chastity and were indulging in sexual sin. Therefore God found no reason to keep things going as they were and destroyed the world but saved Noah and his family and destroyed the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. These stories teach us and reflect on how God views chastity and how important and sacred it is. Unlike the world we are currently living in which normalizes sexual sin before marriage.
- + Sex and Sexuality: Through the Eyes of the Church
- To Express and experience holy love with one another.
 - Sex outside of the marital covenant without any selfless acts of love or intention of eternal commitment to another person is a sin.
 - When we take God's gifts and we direct them towards the self rather than towards God, they become destructive, they develop into passions and can lead to eternal death.
 - Example: If we were to take a big sharp chef's knife and place it in the hands of a toddler who runs around and bumps into everything and everyone, the knife in this case is considered extremely dangerous and a hazard. However, if we place the same knife in the hands of a world class Chef, the knife becomes a tool to create a wonderful meal. The problem is not the knife, it is the person that holds the knife, the context and the purpose of its use.
 - The Church's stance has always been that sex outside of what God has intended for us which is sex within a marriage is not holy and can lead to destruction. But within the union of marriage, sex is wondrous and a beautiful thing.
 - God has blessed sex within the marriage to help the believer fight the passions of lust that we face in a very sex saturated society.
 - Society has turned human sexuality into something that is depraved and a source of great evil in our lives.
 - Human trafficking, child abuse, addiction to pornography and addiction to a whole variety of sexual activities and sexually transmitted diseases are all on the rise.
 - When we aspire to patiently endure and fight these lusts for the sake of embracing a greater gift in the future (sexuality in this case) that we can find the courage and the support of the Holy Spirit to preserve us without sin until the appointed time that is set by God.
 - Jesus said that even looking at someone lustfully is a sin. We should struggle for purity, not only in our actions but in our minds and hearts.
 - A simple tip: when your eyes start to wander, recite the Lord's Prayer or the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner.
 - Achieving teenage purity through one's habits and thoughts is a must. One of the old men said, "It is written concerning Solomon that he loved women, but every male loveth the females, and we must restrain and draw onwards our nature by main force to purity" ([Paradise of the Fathers](#)).
 - A Way of Procreation: A to Build a Church of your own
 - When the Priest unites a man and a woman in Holy matrimony, he says a lot of prayers to the bride and groom that introduces the Holy Spirit to unite the 2 getting married. These prayers reflect the importance of purity and chastity and blesses the union of marriage between the man and woman.

- “What God has joined, let no man separate” (Matthew 19:6).
- “They are no longer two but one flesh”, one spirit, one heart, one aim, and one life, for they are not two but one.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ Continues To bless them by granting them the gift of their love in the form of another life they will nurture and love. In the process they become a new entity, a family, a Church.
- Therefore when you "save yourself for marriage" you are truly giving yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to the one person that God has chosen for you.
- You will partake in the gifts that the Holy Spirit has blessed the marriage with and it will be more special and intimate than if you were to have pre marital sex.

+ What is dating and what is its goal and purpose?

Consider returning to the word “chastity” written on the board or the piece of paper. Ask again what it means. Together as a class, make an official class definition and write it with the word. Then brainstorm how this can relate to worldly dating and how untimely dating impacts chastity.

- Any relationship that is not intended for marriage isn’t right. It can lead to emotional attachment and further to sin.
- The timing of dating is important as we are looking for our spiritual partner in life and marriage.
- You need to be spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally, financially and educationally mature when you start dating.
- In our western culture, most people start dating at a young age for fun and this can lead to spiritual, emotional, mental and physical hurt.
- There is nothing wrong to like someone or have feelings towards the opposite sex. It is taking untimely action on these emotions that is not right and can lead to unhealthy relationships and other sins. The church teaches us to guard our minds and flee from all sorts of temptation.
- Out of the wisdom of our church, teens are highly discouraged and steered away from the awful habit of dating and premarital relationships.
- We may think that we are strong and will not be influenced however this is almost never the case, for eventually our emotions will give in to the negative desires of the flesh.
- We must continually endeavor for purity and never doubt that this is the true will of God as seen throughout the bible. It is only after the teen has achieved purity, can he truly consider himself among the children of God as one who truly pleases God in all thought, intention, and action. This is what we must strive for both as teens and throughout the course of our lives.
- As Orthodox Christians have the Scriptures as a help, and we also have prayers, confession, communion, the prayers of the saints on our behalf, and so much more to help us become more pure as we connect to God!

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.4: Honesty & Promises

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To understanding the meaning of being completely honest

Application

Realize honesty comes easily when it is practiced daily. What are some exercises that you can do to help you examine your life? What should you do in situations where lying would be the easiest way out? How should you address situations where you are tempted to create a better impression of yourself?

References and Resources



Scripture: [Matthew 5:33-37](#); [1 Corinthians 13:6](#); [Ephesians 4:25](#); [Philippians 4:8](#); [Colossians 3:9-10](#); [1 Peter 3:10](#); [Zechariah 8:16-17](#); [Psalm 5:6](#); [Psalm 15:1-2](#); and [Psalm 51:6](#)



Liturgy: [The prayers for repentance and confession](#)



Patristics: [Early Christian Monks of the Desert](#)



Story: Adam & Eve, St. Julita & St. Quiricus, St. Demiana



Other: [Orthodox Churches in America](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Honesty is a virtue.

- Honesty means to speak the truth and never “bear false witness” (Ex 20:16).
- “Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though it may seem disqualified. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.” (2 Corinthians 13:7-8)
- Honesty means to act truly and openly, without pretense, or the presentation of a false image of oneself. It basically means not to be a hypocrite. Our Lord Jesus Christ hated and condemned hypocrisy, lying and deceit. A spiritual person is not a hypocrite. They show themselves honestly for who they are and what they've done and do not pretend to be something they're not. In being honest, an individual does not say or do anything that would lead people to have a false impression of themselves or of anyone or anything. The individual needs to be honest and pure in everything they think, say. Knowing that God judges uprightly all those who walk in integrity.
- Admitting when we are wrong or have done something wrong is the first step to becoming honest.
- Don't be defensive or be in denial when we have made a mistake. Confess our sins and repent. We want to protect our ego and come up with excuses or blame others for our mistakes. Ex. Adam and Eve, they both sinned and made a mistake and instead of owning up to their sin and being honest about it, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. This lack of honesty led to being exiled from Paradise. True self esteem can be found when we admit our mistakes and shortcomings and we can learn from them and correct them. If we don't admit and be honest about our mistakes or sin, we will repeat it again and again and can't improve ourselves.
- One of the Fathers used to tell of a certain Abba Paul, from Lower Egypt, who lived in the Thebaid. He used to take various kinds of snakes in his hands and cut them through the middle. The brethren made prostration before him saying, ‘Tell us what you have done to receive this grace.’ He said, ‘Forgive me, Fathers, but if someone has obtained purity, everything is in submission to him, as it was to Adam, when he was in paradise before he transgressed the commandment.’

+ Benefits of Honesty.

- Honesty promotes authenticity. Honesty is a reflection of oneself's own thoughts and feelings. If we want people to know who we really are, be honest in our self-expression. Being authentic and saying what we feel and think feels great! By doing so, we break free of the limitations of fear. An Honest Christian person should reflect God's image to the world. “You are the salt of the earth; You are the light of the world.. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matt 5:13-16. Examples are Abraham in front of the sons of Heth. They could see God through Abraham “Hear us, my lord; You are a mighty prince among us;” Genesis 23:6. Also Isaac & Abimelech “But they said ‘We have certainly seen that the Lord is with you.’” Genesis 26:28. Spiritual people are preaching God to the world with



their true, honest deeds. When people respond with honesty, it can create more interpersonal closeness and authenticity. This often translates into love and can create an ongoing evolution of loving relationships.

- Honesty fosters courage. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is doing what we know we want or need to do, despite our fear. It takes an immense amount of courage to say what we feel. It is often difficult and takes practice and patience. All of the Church's Martyrs were so courageous to confess their faith in front of their persecutors. The 3 years old St Quiricus was crying "I'm Christian" while his mother St Julita was being tortured. Both the mother and the son were not afraid to confess their faith in front of the governor.
- Another example of a great sainte is St. Demiana and her courage to confront her fathers who denied his faith and then was not hesitant to give up her life for Christ.
- "Sin is followed by shame. Repentance is followed by boldness." St. John Chrysostom
- Honesty shows you care. Being honest with yourself and with others shows how much you really care. It also demonstrates self-respect and respect for others. A caring attitude makes people stop and think. Gentle honesty is also very attractive and appealing.

+ Honesty with Myself

- It is necessary for your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ to be honest with yourself because God is Truth and in Him there is no deceit. Therefore in order to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we must present ourselves as we really are. "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts"(Psalm 51:6).
- We must recognize and shed light on the sins that ail our souls, so that we can seek the appropriate therapy. The sins we commit hinder our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, but bringing these sins at His feet and asking for His help will cure and deepen our relationship with God. Arsenius 9. "A brother questioned Abba Arsenius to hear a word of him and the old man said to him, 'Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions.'" The Sayings of the Desert Fathers - The Alphabetical Collection,; Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975. Print
- We need to examine our behavior, thoughts, words, act, and feelings at all times. This should be a continual exercise not limited to certain occasions (ex during Lent or any other fast). Honesty to oneself is the way to repentance like the Prodigal son "But when he came to himself, he said "how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare and I perish with hunger" Luke 15:17

+ Honesty with Others

Consider discussing the concept of white lies and whether they are considered sins (yes). Even though they may protect others one feelings? (yes, that is not to say we can simply be blunt and hurt others, wisdom is also required in honesty).

- The commandment is clear: "you shall not bear false witness" - Ex 20:16. It is not a conditional statement.
- St. Paul says in Ephesians 4:25 "Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."
- Honesty with one another is essential and not optional because we are part of one body. We cannot share each other's joys and sorrows if we are not honest with one another. St. Demiana honestly & courageously rebuked her father for renouncing his faith. She encouraged him to repent & confess his faith. She cared about her father's eternal life and led him to the crown of martyrdom.

+ Barriers to Honesty:

- The devil, who is a liar and the father of lies, tricks us into thinking that lying will make us more respected, more appreciated, live more comfortably, or get us out of a tough situation. We lie also because we do not want people to know who we truly are, we want to fit in a certain group and because we are competing with one another.
- Fear: Fear of consequences or punishment could lead to lying. That needs a lot of courage to admit one's actions.
- Easiness: Being overly concerned with the cares of the world and busy with life's demands lead to dishonesty. It's easy & more convenient to lie to get to what everyone else is getting and the excuse is " everyone is doing that". We are called to be different from the world. "If you were of the world, the world would love its one. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." John 15:19.
- Lack of Practice; Frequent Confession allows us to examine ourselves and leads to developing honesty with ourselves.
- Pleasing people, one other barrier for being honest is the truth hurts. Someone once said, "Honesty without tact is cruelty." More often than not, we hurt others with the truth because we said it the wrong way. This is why tact is important; this is why we need to think our words through. Ask yourself whether the words you choose are sensitive, accurate, and can be said from a place of love. You can always be right about what you say, but be wrong in how you say it. So think twice, maybe even three times before you tell the person a risky truth.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.5: Entitlement

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To understand what entitlement is, its consequences, some examples from the Bible, and how to resist it.

Application

Look out for the resentments that arise in the course of your day. Simply track them. Be aware of the moments of grumbling and then, say that uncomfortable verse as your prayer to God: I am an unprofitable servant; let me do what I am obliged to do.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Exodus 17:2-4](#), [Numbers 14:1-3](#), [Exodus 16:12](#),
[Numbers 21: 5](#), [Numbers 21:6](#), [Genesis 2: 15-17](#), [Luke 9:23](#),
[Matthew 6:11](#), [Matthew 6:34-35](#), [James 4:1-10](#)



Liturgy: [Thanksgiving Prayer](#)



Patristics: [St. Isaac the Syrian](#)



Story: [Adam and Eve: The Israelites](#)



Other: [Sermon on James 4](#); [The Lost Kid](#), [LaCopts](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What is Entitlement?

- Entitlement has many forms and can be called many things such as pride, self-will, esteem of self, hubris, audacity.
- Its main core is a sense that whatever I have is not good enough or worse, that the good things I have are good enough, and I deserve them.
- You start to believe and think that whatever you have is "owed" to you and you deserve it. Saying "I'm grateful because it's what I deserve" is just as bad as saying "I'm ungrateful because it's not what I deserve."
- Pride is the entitlement's companion: Ex. when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Not only did they sin, disobey, they also felt a sense of entitlement that overcame their love for God. "This fruit is good, and I deserve it. It belongs to me." Just because something looks good doesn't mean you should have it. Eve ate the forbidden fruit because it was attractive to her in every conceivable way. But there are a lot of pretty things in this world that will end up hurting you (Proverbs 23:31-32). Remember that you are only entitled to whatever God in His grace decides you ought to have—nothing more, nothing less.
- We are only deserving of good things when God decides it's good and the correct timing for it. God gave Adam and Eve ALL the garden trees to eat from except one (Genesis 2: 15-17), yet they desired the ONE thing God commanded not to eat from and forgot all the other privileges they have.

+ How did the Israelites show the entitlement mentality?

- The Israelites complained many times in their exodus from Egypt that they were about to stone Moses. They didn't appreciate all the miracles God performed to get them out of the land of slavery and the many kingdoms that He gave them triumph over (even though they could have never achieved this being a nation with no army training). They always focus their attention on what they are missing at the moment. (Exodus 17:2-4), (Numbers 14:1-3).
- The Israelites asked for food; God rained bread and meat from heaven (Exodus 16:12), then they started again complaining and spoke against God and Moses (Numbers 21: 5). This is a perfect example of never thanking and constantly feeling entitled, no matter how much you get; sure enough, the consequences of their acts were sure to follow (Numbers 21:6).
- Remember always "The mouth, which is continuously giving thanks, receives blessing from God. In the heart that always shows gratitude, grace abides." St. Isaac the Syrian. (The Wisdom of St. Isaac the Syrian. Fairacres Oxford, England: SLG Press.)

+ What is the Christian perspective on Entitlement?

- What we deserve is actually nothing at all! So the appropriate affection we should have when good things happen to us is gratitude, joy, and thanks.



- We have been called to “deny” self and follow Christ (Luke 9:23)
- The correct affection in every case is absolute, unqualified gratitude. Even awareness of God’s wrath is cause for gratitude, for He gives us His divine wrath rather than divine apathy.
- Everything good and what we deem as “bad” is coming from God and we need to be aware that He is the one who gives it to us and we don’t create it for ourselves. Without God, we are nothing and He is the one who gives us all we have.
- Doing good deeds doesn’t warrant good rewards. We shouldn’t be doing good things like helping out, studying for a test, praying, listening to your parents or teachers, etc because you are waiting for a “deserving reward”. Instead, you do all these good deeds from the humbleness of your heart, the purity and Holy Spirit working inside of you without any expectations of any reward.
- If you end up receiving a reward like doing well on a test you studied for, getting something you wanted because you listened to your parents, it’s all from God because He deemed it right to give. Not because you were deserving of these rewards for the good behavior or actions you took.
- Jesus Christ said, “give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) and He said, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient to the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:34-35). Here Jesus Christ is saying that we shouldn’t worry about tomorrow and what we need for tomorrow or later. We need to be grateful and happy for what we have now and what He has given us. God doesn’t want us to put our minds anywhere else and just focus on what wonderful things we have now and be thankful for all we have.
- Contentment is an important characteristic. St. Paul wrote, “*Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*” (Philippians 4:11). The Israelites were not content with what God provided them (Numbers 11:6; Exodus 16:3). Many today are also not content with the blessings they have received from God and believe they are *entitled* to something more

+ How does Entitlement impact us?

- Entitlement can affect us and impact us in a negative way. When you feel that you deserve love, companionship, happiness, honesty, obedience, etc. from your parents, classmates, friends or anyone else and you don’t receive it, you can start to feel angry and get used to that feeling. Entitlement works hand in hand with expectations.
- This is another form of entitlement and feeling that you deserve certain reactions or feelings in return for something you have done or actions you have taken. Doing things for the sake of doing them and expecting a certain reaction or recognition in return is a form of entitlement.
- All of this can lead you down a path of feeling deserving of certain things and when you don’t get them, it causes you feelings of anger, resentment and hate.
- It is for this reason St. James says that all fight and wars come from this sense of entitlement and desires (James 4:1-10)
- It is important to see that the word “title” is embedded in the word “entitlement”. Whenever we make a demand based on our “title”, we act from an entitlement perspective.
- The “entitlement mentality” is serious because it is a threat to contentment and is an indirect beginning to one’s rebellion against God. We need to be content with all of the good things that God has given us (James 1:17) and submit to His will rather than pursuing our own selfish interests (Luke 9:23).

+ Donations as Spiritual therapy against entitlement

- Giving back something like donations to the Church is a remedy to the spirit of entitlement. It is God who gave you your education that led to your job/career that led to you making money/earning an income.
- Without God’s will and Him creating all of this, you wouldn’t be where you are today. Giving back to the church via donations is a form of showing your gratitude and thanks to God for all that He has given you.
- Jesus Christ never forces anyone to do anything or enforce His laws or ways by using His title. Instead, He recognized that obedience and respect are freely given.
- A sense of entitlement robs us of our gratitude. Gratitude is the opposite of entitlement.
- The opposite of entitlement is being grateful and thankful for everything we’ve been given and blessed with from God. God is truly great and loves us so unconditionally that we need to be truly grateful and thankful for everything we have been blessed with.
- Jesus confronted a spirit of entitlement when He announced, “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’ ” (Luke 17:10).
- The Prayer of Thanksgiving is one of the most beautiful prayers in the Agpeya book, the Coptic Orthodox book of hours, because it reflects what we feel in our hearts towards our God, and our Father, and our King. The Church starts all her services by praying it.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.6: Self-Esteem

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To help the student understand who they are and develop a Christ-Centered self-esteem

Application

Contemplate on: How do you find the perfect balance between pride and self-doubt? Discuss with your father of confession.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ex 2:11-4:17](#); [2 Timothy 1:7](#); [Philippians 4:13](#); [Psalm 62:5-6](#); [Psalm 28:7](#); [Psalm 139:13-15](#)



Liturgy - [Gregorian Liturgy](#)



Patristics: St. Basil the Great



Story: [Moses doubting God choosing him to lead Israel out of Egypt](#)



Other: [Where do we find our identity](#), HG Bishop Anghelos; [Self-Esteem](#), Suscpts Article; [HG Bishop Youssef Q&A on Pride](#); [St. George and St. Reweis's Curriculum](#) (Pages 47-53), [How should a Christian view Self Esteem](#) - Virgin Mary & Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + The Burning Bush: Approaching God, God working with imperfection. The example of Moses and self-esteem.
 - Where was Moses and what was he doing when the angel of the Lord appeared to him? (3:1-2)
 - The exchange between the Lord and Moses consists of a series of questions and responses. Look up the questions Moses asked (and his excuses) and the responses God gave him. Use the chart below to record what you find.
 - Moses & God
 - Who am I? (Exodus 3:11-12)
 - Who are You? (Exodus 3:13-15)
 - What if... (Exodus 3:4:1-9)
 - I am not talented... (Exodus 4:10-16)
 - Discuss: Which of the questions did God not answer directly? Why?
- + What is self-esteem?
 - Many define self-esteem as "feelings of worth based on their skills, accomplishments, status, financial resources, or appearance." This kind of self-esteem can lead a person to feel independent and prideful and to indulge in self-worship, which dulls our desire for God. James 4:6 tells us that *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* If we only trust in our earthly resources, we will inevitably be left with a sense of worth based on pride.
 - Self-esteem is difficult to define. On the most basic level, it can be defined as how one views themselves. The concept of self-esteem can be divided into two major categories: worth and competence.
 - Our opinion of ourselves depends largely on how we have learned to think about ourselves from the "important people" in our lives. If the "important people" in our life have helped us to feel important and loved, we will be inclined to have a healthy opinion of ourselves. This is a type of self-worth based on the value. The value upon which we base ourselves is where self-esteem in the world, differentiate from self-esteem with God.
 - Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is called pride. Thinking less highly of ourselves than we ought to think is false humility. Thinking about ourselves soberly is true humility.

+ Levels of Self-Esteem

- Tending towards False Humility: If people have given us a reason to feel inadequate or unneeded, we then find ourselves thinking negatively about ourselves like:
 - There is something wrong with me, I don't belong here, I don't like myself, I don't have what it takes, I don't compare well, I just want to hide
- Tending towards Pride: Another type of bad self-esteem is false hope that is given or found by the media and even in religious circles. It leads to self-confidence that makes you say things like:
 - I can be anything I want to be, I deserve more, I do not need anyone else's help, I do not have any regrets, I do not have any fears.
 - "For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." - Gal 6:3
- Tending towards True Humility: Instead, the right kind of self-esteem rests on a fair assessment of our real strengths and weaknesses and God's involvement in them. A healthy self-esteem expresses itself with a confidence:
 - My life has a purpose, I can be anything God enables me to be, I will seek forgiveness for my wrongs, I belong here, I can love and be loved, I need others as they need me. "You also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty"" (Luke 17:10).

+ Types of Healthy Self Esteem:

Note that in this context we are talking of self-esteem more in the context of 'self-value' in Christ.

- 1. Self Esteem with Humility
 - As we pray in the liturgy, "Because of the multitude of Your compassions, You formed me when I had no being."
 - "Sciences and professions are not learned without practice. He who wishes to learn Philosophy, Literature, or one of the professions, needs to practice working at it in order to perfect it. Likewise, humility and other decent virtues cannot be perfected without practice." St. Basil the Great
 - Christian self-esteem is based on humility because the Holy Spirit in us does not work with people who are filled with pride (Jm 4:6).
 - Christians depend on God's protection and gifts, and they respect and honor themselves on that basis. This means self-respect and self-honor are based on giving glory to God not to the self.
 - Therefore it is important to have a healthy self-image that reflects our dependence on God.
 - Another prayer from the liturgy, "You, as a Lover of mankind, created me, a man. You had no need of my servitude. Rather, it was me who was in need of Your lordship."
 - The difference between being proud and self confident lies in how much you trust yourself and how much you trust God. The self-confident person trusts in God and that is why he is self confident "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13). The proud person trusts in himself and not in God.
- 2. Self Esteem based on God's measure not people
 - We should not compare ourselves to others, or listen to what others say about us. Instead, we have to think of what God will think of us.
 - We do not have to praise ourselves. We do not have to look for people's praise for us to be good. We are good because God is with us and we are doing our share all the time under His direction.
 - "Do nothing from selfishness and empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." - Eph 2:3-4
- 3. Self-esteem as a by-product of the nearness of God
 - We should feel good about ourselves as a by-product of the nearness of God, not by esteeming ourselves directly.
 - We should feel good about ourselves and have confidence as a result of the nearness of God, but not because of self-directed praise.

+ What forms our identity?

- Different aspects of our lives make us who we are and help form our identity. (Ex. Our upbringing, community, schooling, family, friends, society, etc.)
- Despite all of that, it all comes down to what we do, how we do it, that is what is important and not the people we surround ourselves with. The world is made up of a lot of individuals and we need to filter through all of that and look at ourselves to form/create our identity built on clarity and Christ.
- What binds us together as individuals is how we see ourselves. We say we are a family (Coptic, family, Christians, etc). We are a unity and are part of the Body of Christ. So do we live in the way that Christ has shown us to live or not?



- Are we good brothers and sisters in Christ and do we live in that way? Who do we feel closest to and why?
- What makes us close to people? Is it those who do the will of God? Those who are smart? Those who are popular? When we define others, this is how we define ourselves. These are the people around that are a part of you and you are a part of them. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." Mark 3:35
- As we grow, develop and our social network changes, we gain experience. It is most challenging at this age because not only are you trying to find and define who you are, so is everyone else around you.
- 1. Therefore in making those friendships, you start to develop yourself and define who you are and define who you are going to be when you get older.
- 2. Who you surround yourself around affects how you think, how you assess situations, how you choose what is the correct way as you get older.
- We sometimes surround ourselves with the wrong crowd and this causes us to have low self esteem. It affects how we think, how we act and how we deal with situations.

+ We need to work on our own spirituality.

Consider discussing: how are self-esteem & confession related? (Would excessive (prideful) self-esteem prevent you from confessing? Or excessive shame (false humility)? What is the cause of lack of confession?)

- How can you live a righteous life in an unrighteous setting? You can't live 2 separate lives (one that is spiritual-at church or home, and one that is not-school or friends). It is also more difficult to live a righteous life when your surroundings are not righteous. We need to live 1 life, 1 character, 1 personality.
- Read the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. Spend time praying and asking God to help you develop more godly self-esteem. Find verses in the Bible that will encourage you to have godly self-esteem. Write them down and tape them to the mirror you use most often. Read the verses every time you use that mirror.
- We need to know how to deal with everyone in the world both good and bad.
- Seek those who do the will of God. The will of God is your sanctification, it is Holiness, it is the key to enter His kingdom. So if you are surrounded by those who do the will of God and seek the will of God, you will be supported. Even if you stumble through life, they will pick you up and support you.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.7: Peer Pressure; Definition and Examples from Scripture

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To understand the power of peer influence; positive and negative. Identify the qualities of a good friend.

Application

How did Jesus react when his close friend tried to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem and risk persecution? (Matthew 16:21-23) You need to surround yourself with the appropriate friends that will help carry you and get you closer to God while not conforming to peer pressure in order to preserve your strength and relationship with God.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Mark 9:42](#), [Mark 15:15](#), [Matthew 16](#), [Ephesians 5:3](#), [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#), [Proverbs 20:1](#), [Matthew 5:13](#), [Matthew 5:11-12](#), [John 5: 7-8](#), [Proverbs 12:26](#), [Romans 12:2](#)



Liturgy: [Greek Psali Watos for the Three Saintly Children/Midnight Praise](#)



Patristics: [Elder Amphilochios Makris, Confessions by St. Augustine of Hippo](#)



Story: [Solomon's wives turned his heart after other gods. 1 Kings 11:4](#)



Other: [St. George and St. Rueiss Curriculum](#) (pages 186-193); [Teen Peer Pressure Video](#); [Know who you are, Bishop Anqaelos](#); [Social and Peer Pressure, Bishop Anqaelos](#); [Legacy Curriculum Grade 8](#) (Pages 44-47)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + What did Jesus mean when he warned us of being stumbling blocks? (Mark 9:42).
 - A stumbling block is an obstacle to progress to others. in other words a cause of stumbling or sin to others.
 - One's careless or sinful behavior can cause others to trip on their faith. We may think our actions don't matter. But our actions impact others as well as ourselves.
 - It costs us to resist the culture and stand for our faith. But Jesus warned that going with the flow and being a stumbling block that leads other believers into error costs more.
 - We should avoid being a stumbling block at all costs.
- + What is Peer Pressure?
 - Peer pressure is the strong influence your friends have on you that dictates the clothes you wear, the words you say, the places you go to and the attitude you have.
 - It is the pressure you experience to conform to the standards and the values of your friends even if you don't want to.
 - It can be either positive if you have good friends or negative if you have bad friends.
 - Negative example: Pilate releasing Barabas and scourging Jesus to PLEASE the crowd - Mark 15:15
 - Positive example: Jesus rebuking St. Peter when he protested his death - Matthew 16
 - We read in the Book of Daniel the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and abed-Nego and how they encouraged each other not to worship the gold image. We pray in the midnight praise the Greek Psali Watos for the Three Saintly Children and say: "Gather now and persevere"
- + Why is Peer Pressure so Powerful?
 - Peer pressure is so powerful because we are born with a need to be loved and accepted. God wants you to find this need fulfilled in your relationship with Him.

- The more distant you are from God, the greater your need becomes for acceptance by people, the more significant the opinions of your friends become and the more vulnerable you become to peer pressure. "Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made." - St. Augustine of Hippo (Confessions)
- Too much time and energy in life gets spent trying to fit in...trying to be seen as "normal". Normal is pretty boring. After all, why be normal when you can be exceptional?
- As a strong Christian, you should only care about what God thinks of you and not care about what others think of you.
- There are 3 areas in your life that are greatly affected by peer pressure: sexual life, drugs/drinking and religion.

+ Sexual Life Peer Pressure

- Having sexual relations before marriage is called fornication, which is a sin and angers God. (Ephesians 5:3)
- Virginity is something you can give away only once, so you should not sacrifice it because you cannot get it back.
- It's not just about losing your virginity, it is about being pure and keeping yourself pure for your significant other. Lust is what your peers are searching for and offering, not love. Love is pure and precious and when the time is right, it is something shared between married people.
- When it comes to peer pressure to have a boyfriend/girlfriend, you must keep in mind the purpose of that relationship and is it the right time for it? Fitting in isn't always the right thing to do and standing up for what you know is right is what you need to aim for.
- Social media plays a large role in sexual peer pressure. Posting inappropriate pictures of yourself and receiving "positive" feedback is a form of peer pressure. All your friends might be posting photos and commenting on photos giving you the feeling to follow and do the same.

+ Peer pressure about drugs and drinking.

- The Bible says that your body is God's temple, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells on you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)
- Drug and alcohol abuse does nothing positive for your body. On the contrary, it is destructive and damages both your mental and physical health.
- When you're intoxicated, your judgment is off and it can lead you to sin even more and cause harm to yourself and others.
- Resisting taking drugs helps you to avoid bad things and dangerous things like addiction, loss of memory, panic attacks, depression, anxiety, drowsiness, impaired judgment, irritability, and violent behavior.
- Just because something is legal, (alcohol and marijuana) it does not make it right.
- The Bible says, "*Wine is a mocker, intoxicating drink arouses brawling, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.*" (Proverbs 20:1)

+ Peer pressure and Religion

- Do not let the fear of losing your friends keep you from standing up for your faith and your beliefs.
- We should be able to stand up for what we believe in. Many of your friends may be waiting for someone to just lead the way so you will have a positive role to lead others. "*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?*" - Matthew 5:13
- The Bible tells us that we're going to be persecuted for His name "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." - Matthew 5:11-12
- Be thankful and proud that you are Christian and you've been given a gift that you know Jesus Christ and have the opportunity to obtain eternal salvation in Heaven.
- If your friends reject you because of your belief and religion, it is really Jesus Christ whom they are rejecting.
- Regardless of how hard or long it seems, if you want to honor your Lord and lead a peaceful life and have a share in eternal life, you must take the road to what is right, the road that leads away from temptation. Doing this requires faith and many prayers.

+ Do not compromise and do not conform to peer pressure.

- In order not to compromise, you must become a person of convictions. A conviction is a standard that you have committed yourself to keeping, regardless of what it costs you.
- For example, you should have a conviction that says: Because my body is the temple of God, I will never take any drugs or alcohol or smoke.
- Once you know what your convictions are, you need to practice them and live by your convictions. Do not let peer pressure persuade you otherwise. "Why fit in when you were born to STAND OUT!" - Dr Seuss
- Just remember that Jesus Christ is always in your corner and standing up for what you believe in is essentially standing up for Him and



everything He has done for us like dying on the cross and saving us.

- At any time you feel you are alone, forgotten by others and not in their considerations or “have no man”, Jesus himself will be there for you (John 5: 7-8).
- + Surrounding yourself with good friends, positive friends, friends that believe in Jesus Christ will help you avoid peer pressure and feeling that you need to fit in.
 - When you have a strong friend base, they will have the same beliefs as you and won't pressure you to do things that you are uncomfortable doing. (Proverbs 12:26)
 - When you are comfortable and strong in your belief and relationship with Jesus Christ, you won't feel the need to conform to the pressures you face in your daily life. (Romans 12:2)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 6.8: Habits

Building Block 6:
Discerning the Pathway
to a Better Life



Objective

To uproot unhealthy habits and establish a way to root within oneself good spiritual habits.

Application

Learn from the regularity of church services and adopt a habit of attending next services that you may not have been exposed to. Attend Vespers and Praises on a regular basis. Suggest once a month, if not already regular. Establish a goal of a frequency, and be persistent.

References and Resources



Scripture: [2 Corinthians 6:2](#), [2 Corinthians 7:1](#), [1 Corinthians 11:1](#)



Liturgy: Regularity of Services; [The Synaxarion](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom \(Concerning Frequent Communion, p. 169\)](#), [St. John Climacus: Abba Dorotheos \(Eastern Church Father\)](#)



Story: [Saint John The Short](#)



Other: [Be the Bee 79](#), [Be the Bee 147](#); [Legacy Curriculum Grade 6, August week 2](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Ever wish that you could stop procrastinating school work, biting your nails, vaping or gossiping?
 - You are not alone, even though our hands are one of the dirtiest parts of our body, our nails being even more bacteria-ridden yet. However, that doesn't stop plenty of adults from biting their nails: in fact, research suggests that as much as 30 percent of the population engages in this behavior.
 - Biting nails, procrastination...etc are all bad habits; many of the bad habits are sins, like gossiping, while others can lead to immorality.
 - Old habits die hard: "For we can cut off our unruly desires when they are newly born and we don't think about it; we allow them to grow up and harden against us so that we make the last evil greater than the first. For, as I often tell you, it is one thing to uproot a blade of grass and another to uproot a great tree." - St. Dorotheos of Gaza
 - To defeat evil habits, we must notice them through continuous repentance and self-reflection and bring light to them.
 - What does this mean? Can someone destroy darkness? Darkness is not one that gets destroyed, but rather by bringing light into a dark room, darkness ceases to subside.
 - Similarly with sin, one is not to aim to destroy sin, but by discipline and repentance bring light (Christ) into our dark soul. The stronger our relationship with the Holy spirit, the less the darkness of sin has dominion over us.
- + Just like vices are rooted in habits, spiritual life can often be rooted in good habits.
 - Vice is defined as "immoral or wicked behavior", a consequence of sinful habits.
 - Holy In, Garbage Out: Building such good habits is a means to bring light into one's soul. In fact as we try to get rid of old habits, the best way to do so is by bringing in good habits.
 - "Habit is a difficult thing, and it is hard to break and hard to avoid....Therefore, the more you understand the power of a habit, the more should you endeavor to be rid of a bad habit and change yourself over to a good one." -St. John Chrysostom
 - The time for change (replace bad with good) is now. Any positive change is a spirit of repentance which leads to salvation. "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)
 - This is the process of cleansing and perfection spoken of by St. Paul to the Corinthians: "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." - 2 Corinthians 7:1
- + Which habits should I develop?
 - Through Biblical Readings: The word of God and His voice through the Bible will always open my eyes for new exercises that I need to adopt and



train myself to it. For example, let us assume you are struggling with anger with someone and you read Matthew 5 where it tells you to turn the other cheek, you may learn from that, through the Spirit, a proper method to deal with said conflict.

- Through the Counsel of your Father of Confession: Your father of confession could help you and guide you on how to start some spiritual exercises and to grow in it until you develop a good spiritual habit. The father of confession will help you in developing the habit of continuous and regular prayer, reading the Bible regularly and even growing in the habit of regular confession with him.
- By being inspired by the life of the Saints, therefore, the Synaxarion is an important part of the liturgy readings.
- The virtues of the saints are very good examples to us to try to follow their paths and imitate them. For example, I can start to train myself on the virtue of obedience when I learn the story of St. John the short: Aba Pemouah, who was his director for his first lesson, bade him to plant in the ground a walking-stick, and water it every day till it should bring forth fruit. Saint John did so with great simplicity, though the river was about 12 miles away from the stick. When he had continued his task, without speaking one word about it, into the third year the stick, which had taken root, pushed forth leaves and buds and produced fruit.
- Another example is Anba Abram of El-Fayoum who was generous to the poor. So, I can start training myself to be like Anba Abram, loving, caring and giving to the poor.
- All the saints had good virtues that we can learn from them and start to train ourselves with different spiritual exercises. By continuously adding good habits to our day-to-day life, we grow spiritually, and also, these good habits displace and replace any bad habits, thus changing our old self to be more like our savior. (1 Corinthians II:I)

+ How to develop a Spiritual Habit

- Set a Reasonable Objective: The exercise has to be clear and very specific. For example, you cannot say that you will train yourself to be righteous because there are many virtues under righteousness that will have to be acquired. These could include controlling your words and behavior, being gentle and loving to others, praying, fasting, and caring for the poor and sick. So, if you want to be righteous, then you would have to train yourself on each of the specific individual virtues to attain the mother virtue.
- Establish a Realistic Timing: The suitable time for the exercise is very important. It has to be the right time for you and for others to practice the exercise. You cannot possibly practice silence on a day when there are visitors coming to visit you and spend time with you. You also may not be able to give to the poor when you have no money. So, it is very important to choose the right time to start and continue your exercise.
- Aim for a Gradual Progression: Begin strong, and aim for progression. "To lag in the fight at the very outset of the struggle and thereby to furnish a token of our coming slaughter is a very hateful and dangerous thing. A firm beginning will certainly be useful for us when we later grow slack. A soul that is strong at first, but then relaxes, is spurred on by the memory of its former zeal. And in this way new wings are often obtained." - St. John Climacus
- Develop a social support system: research shows that having friends or family members who support your goals improves long-term success. Find a school, Sunday school friend, a sibling or a neighbor and encourage them to join your efforts to develop a new good habit, like praying together or attending a weekly mass together. This will offer great encouragement for both of you, and can help you hang in when you feel like giving up.
- Reward yourself: It's human nature to respond positively to rewards. If you've hit a benchmark on your goal, treat yourself, or promise yourself a treat as soon as you hit a specific benchmark.
- Be patient: According to new research out of University College London, the average amount of time it takes to develop a new habit is 66 days, so hang in there.
- Keep a spirit of Perseverance: Anything worth having comes through struggles and perseverance. In fact, the more we struggle and persevere the more we protect and appreciate that which has been fought for.



Building Block 7: Discerning Ritual Details



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 7.I: The Tabernacle of Meeting - Symbolism, History and Outer Court

Building Block 7:
Discerning Ritual
Details



Objective

Explaining the spiritual symbols of the tabernacle and their continuity in the Church of the New Testament.

Application

Contemplate on this question: How do you think the high priest felt when he went into the Holy of Holies once a year? Awe, fear? How do you feel when you go to church?

References and Resources



Scripture: [Exodus 25:8](#), [Exodus 13:21](#), [Deuteronomy 6:13-9:24](#), [John 10:9](#), [Ephesians 2:8](#), [Hebrews 5:5-6](#), [Genesis 22:13](#), [Isaiah 53:2](#), [Hebrews 5:5-6](#), [Revelation 5:15](#), [John 1:14](#), [Isaiah 53:2-3](#)



Liturgy: [The Sunday Theotokia Parts 13-15](#)



Patristics [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#)



Story: St. Mary's symbols



Other: [Legacy Curriculum Grade 7 October Week 2 and 3](#), [Legacy Curriculum Grade 12 October Week 1 and Week 2](#), [The Tabernacle: Why it is important to us. SUS Article](#), [Tabernacle of Meeting Image](#), [Illustration](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ God is among His People

- The Tabernacle of meeting is the symbol of the presence of the Incarnated God. It indicates God's presence in the Church and His unity with her members.
- The whole construction symbolizes the coming together of believers, as one building, into the living altar of God; as the apostle explains, In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21,22).
- God commanded Moses and gave him all the details to build a tabernacle of meeting for Him to live amongst His people. "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." Exodus 25:8. He also guided them in the wilderness in the cloud to reach the Promised Land. How great is God's love for His people that He longs to live with them and walk with them their way. "And The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night." Exodus 13:21

+ History of the Tabernacle of Meeting

- There was a meeting tent mentioned in Exodus 33:7-11 which Moses had erected outside the camping place of the people of Israel, but there are no details about it. When Moses went into that tent, all the people came out and stood, each at the door of his own tent. They would watch the pillar of cloud as it rested at the entrance of the tent of the meeting while God spoke to Moses.
- It stood in the middle of the twelve tribes of Israel. When Moses went into the tabernacle, all the people stood at the door of his own tent. It clearly symbolizes the presence of God in the midst of His people. "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you" (Deuteronomy 23:14).
- The people would watch the pillar of cloud while God spoke to Moses. The Tabernacle of Meeting was transported to other places a number of times. A column of cloud would appear during the day, and a column of fire by night to direct them (Exodus 13:21).

- During the reign of one of the evil kings of Judah, the ark of covenant was removed from the altar. The Holy Bible does not mention it after that.

+ Reconstructing the Tabernacle

- The Tabernacle of Meeting contains of:
 - The Outer Court
 - The Inner Court, to be seen in depth in the following lesson: The Holy Place (consisting of the Altar of Incense, The Golden Lampstand, and the Golden Table of Showbread) and The Holy of Holies (consisting of The Mercy Seat and the Ark of the Covenant)
- The Outer court had multiple items;
 1. The Altar of burnt Offering
 - Made of bronze and acacia wood – 5x5x3 cubits. The bronze is a sign of the strength of those who repent and the wood is a sign of the salvation through the cross. There was a continuous burning fire on the altar that was started by God Himself (Deuteronomy 6:13; 9:24). This fire never stopped to symbolize the continuous love of God that He sacrificed His only begotten Son as a burnt offering for the sin of the whole world. There were 4 horns on the corners of the altar to indicate those four directions of the world and that salvation was for the whole world. <see reference for illustrations>
 2. The Laver;
 - Was made of bronze and filled with water. It was used for the priests to clean their bodies before ordaining them and to clean their hands and feet before entering the Holy. Washing with water is a symbol of baptism and confession before entering to the Holy, which is equivalent to communion. “Repentance is reconciliation with The Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sin. Repentance is purification of consciences.” St. John Climacus - The Ladder of Divine Ascent.
 3. The Gate of the Tabernacle of Meeting
 - The tabernacle of meeting was intended to signal God’s presence in the middle of His people. Moreover, it offered the opportunity for the soul to enter into the presence of his creator. The person entering, however, needs to pass through a door or gate, and Jesus Christ has become that opening through which we can enter. He is the way that leads us into God’s presence and into His heavenly kingdom. Thus the door of the Tabernacle of Meeting is a symbol of Christ in various ways. **“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).**
 - One of St. Mary’s symbols is the Tabernacle of Meeting: At the Annunciation, Archangel Gabriel said, “The power of the Highest will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35) this same verb “episkiazein” (Hebrew “shakan” meaning “dwelling”) was used for the Tabernacle, where God was dwelling among His people and at the moment of the Lord’s Transfiguration and a cloud overshadowed the disciples. Thus, Virgin Mary is the True Tabernacle where God Himself dwelt among His people. As we pray the Sunday Theotokia in the Midnight Praises.
 4. Covering Over the Tabernacle: made out of five different tapestry that joined together which represent God's grace (*Ephesians 2:8*)
 - Blue linen - it is Blue thread cloth (light blue) represents heaven.
 - Purple linen - it is vivid red to denote the King of Glory - purple is a royal color.
 - Scarlet linen - represents sacrifice (dark red) to denote Jesus who was wounded for us.
 - White linen - represents purity. (twined) as a symbol of our Lord’s nature - spotless and without sin - thus denoting our Redeemer.
 - Cherubim designs - are woven in the tapestry
 5. The Fence: covered with four layers of tapestry to separate the believer from the nonbeliever. The curtain of linen on the fence made out of four different covers:
 - Fine linen - represents the holiness of God
 - Goat covering - represents sin
 - Ram covering - represents a substitute for our sins (Genesis 22:13)
 - Badger skin - represents no beauty that we should desire (Isaiah 53:2)
- The Priest Garment:
 - The Ephod: a special vest that God designed for the high priest to wear with all the names of the tribes when he prays day and night on our behalf and when he goes once a year to the Holy of the Holies and makes atonement for our sins. It is a beautiful picture of how God cares for all His people, each individually, and a reminder that Jesus Christ is our high priest (Hebrews 5:5-6).

+ A Discernment of details

- The Importance of Studying the Tabernacle of Meeting. It is an example of heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 5:15)
- It is an example of the incarnation of Christ (John 1:14) The tent was mobile to lead the people in the wilderness as Jesus Christ traveled from one place to another performing miracles and leading people to salvation. The outer appearance of the tent of meeting was humble as it was covered with the skin of goats but the inside was full of gold. This is similar to our Lord Jesus Christ who was humble in appearance but he was the holy divine God (Isaiah 53:2-3). The tent of meeting was the place where God met with His people.
- Studying the details of the Tabernacle instill a level of reverence and respect towards God: The high priest would only enter once per year.
- All the details show that God is a God of order: The sizes, color, locations and rituals were to be followed to a detailed level.

+ How is it important to me?

- When God pays that much attention to design & prepare His dwelling with His people, how much more it is important to be diligent & serious about our Liturgical & Ritual life.
- It's very important to understand the meaning behind everything we do in church. That will help relate what we practice with God's intention in mind. Which opens up a new channel of communicating with God through the Church.
- Understanding the meaning behind the ritual we practice will cut off the boredom & connect you more with the true meaning that will help build a strong relationship with God.
- From which we can find ourselves saying with King David: "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock" (Psalm 27:4-5).



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 7.2: The Tabernacle of Meeting - Inner Court and the Holy of Holies

Building Block 7:
Discerning Ritual
Details



Objective

The Importance Of Studying The Tabernacle Of Meeting

Application

The next time you're in tasbeha, read the full text and understand what we are praying, don't simply recite mindlessly. Have the youth attempt to make comparisons between the Tabernacle of Meeting and the Church today as a preparation for the lesson the following week.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ex 25-31](#), [Revelation 21:23](#), [Psalm 16:11](#), [John 6:35](#), [Psalm 16:11](#), [John 6:35](#), [Revelation 21:10-21](#), [John 1:14](#), [Isaiah 53:2-3](#)



Liturgy: [The Sunday Theotokia Parts 13-15](#)



Patristics [Cyril of Alexandria](#). (2013). *Festal Letters*. 13-30. (J. J. O'Keefe & D. G. Hunter, Eds., P. R. Amidon, Trans.) (Vol. 127, p. 117). Washington, DC: [The Catholic University of America Press](#).



Story: The tabernacle designed by God's instructions



Other: [Legacy Curriculum Grade 7 October Week 2 and 3](#), [Legacy Curriculum Grade 12 October Week 1 and Week 2](#), [The Tabernacle: Why it is important to us](#), [SUS Article](#), [The Ark of Covenant IMG](#), [Inner Court of Tabernacle](#)

➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The story of the Tabernacle

Consider Reviewing the previous lesson: Outer Court and symbolism of Tabernacle of Meeting, Bronze Altar and Bronze Laver

- On their journey to the land of promise God instructed the Israelites to build a tabernacle. This tent structure, its furnishings and even the clothes worn by the priests serving in it were special and beautiful.
- When asked to give supplies and use their skills to build the tabernacle the people were so willing and generous that Moses finally had to tell them to stop.
- When all the work was completed the presence of God filled the tabernacle and was visible to the people as a cloud by day and a fire by night.
- The Outer court had multiple items; The Altar of burnt Offering, The Laver, The Gate of the Tabernacle of Meeting, Covering Over the Tabernacle, The Fence.
- The Inner Court has two main rooms, The Holy Place & the Holy of Holies

+ The Inner Court: The Holy Place

- The first room is called The Holy. It has three items in it.
 - The Golden Lamp Stand: On the south side
 - On the south side, there was no light in the inner court except that which came from the Golden Lampstand. It is likened to the Church which carries and guides toward to only Light of the World, as we say in Tasbeha: "The golden lampstand carrying the True light, who is the unapproachable, Light of the world....They likened the golden candle stand, to the church, and the seven lamps, to its seven orders."
 - Similarly, the light proceeding from the lampstand symbolizes God who is the light of the world, just as Christ is our only source of light and the only light in the heavenly Jerusalem, which needs no sun or moon to lighten it (Revelation 21:23). It refers to the light and grace of the Holy Spirit that fills the Church -pouring blessings upon the members through the

participation in the seven mysteries. The ultimate result is that members, in turn, give out light in their generation for "You are the light of the world".

- The Golden Table of Showbread: Located on the opposite of the Lampstand
 - It was made of acacia wood and gold. Laid on it were 12 unleavened breads representing the 12 tribes of Israel. There was also wine and incense placed on this table. The wood resembles humanity and the gold resembles the divinity of the incarnate Christ. 'the Word who for us has become like us, a human being, that is, according to the economy, that we might be above ourselves, and beyond the limits of humanity, being called God's children, and having as our brother him who is above all creation.' Cyril of Alexandria. The priests ate the bread on the Sabbath after replacing it with 12 new breads. This is a sign of the fullness from the bread of life that never ends or empties. This is similar to our Lord the bread of life and whoever eats from Him will never hunger again (Psalm 16:11, John 6:35). Only priests ate of this bread to indicate that only those who dedicate their lives to Him will not hunger.
- The Altar of Incense: In front of the entrance to the Holy of Holies
 - It is made of acacia wood and gold similar to the table of showbread. It also has a crown of gold and 4 horns at its corners. Its dimensions are 1x1x2 cubits (1 cubit = 45 cm).
 - Aaron raised incense in the morning and the evening of every day. The incense is a symbol of the pleasant aroma of the accepted sacrifice of our Lord on the cross that was smelled by the Father.
- The Veil: Separates the Holy from the Holy of Holies.

+ The Inner Court: The Holy of Holies

- The Holy of Holies is the innermost and most sacred area of the tabernacle. The Holy of Holies was accessible only to the Israelite high priest. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the small, windowless sacred area to burn incense and sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the Mercy Seat. Through the action, the high priest atoned for his own sins and those of the people.
- The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the tabernacle/temple by the veil, a huge, heavy drape made of fine linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn and embroidered with gold cherubim.
 - The Ark of Covenant: the most sacred object in the tabernacle, symbolizing God's presence and His covenant with Israel. Made of acacia wood that was covered with gold from within and without. It contained:
 - The two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments written on them with the finger of God. These were a symbol of the word of God.
 - The Golden Pot where the manna was hidden: **"They likened the golden pot to the Virgin and the measure of the manna to our Savior"** *Sunday Theotokia-Midnight Praises*
 - The rod of Aaron as a symbol of St. Mary's perpetual virginity.
 - The Mercy Seat: Place on the Ark, enclosed by two cherubims
 - The Ark had another part of special importance and that was the mercy seat. God commanded that it be made of pure gold with two cherubim of gold at its ends. The cherubim stretched their wings above, covering the mercy seat and facing each other. God told Moses, **"there I will meet with you and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim which are on the Ark of the Testimony, of all the things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel"** (*Exodus 25:22*). The relationship between the Ark and its cover is interpreted in the prayer of praise recited on Sunday at midnight in the Church, —you, Mary, are the Ark. You were taken from among mankind pure (wood resistant to woodworm), protected by grace (overlaid with gold on the outside and inside), and carried the Son of God (the pure gold cover), who is praised and bowed to by the heavenly ranks (the cherubim). These surround and cover you as you have become the seat of God and the second heaven.
 - Christ sits on the Mercy Seat: Numbers 7:89: And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him. Similarly, we see in John 20:11-12: But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.

+ What's in it for me?

- It is an example of heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10-21)
- It is an example of the incarnation of Christ: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only



begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

- The tent was mobile to lead the people in the wilderness as Jesus Christ traveled from one place to another performing miracles and leading people to salvation.
- The outer appearance of the tent of meeting was humble as it was covered with the skin of goats but the inside was full of gold. This is similar to our Lord Jesus Christ who was humble in appearance but he was the holy divine God: “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:2-3
- Two Cherubim on the top of the Ark with four heads (Ezekiel 10:21) that represent the different pictures of Jesus (lion, ox, human, eagle) and also the mercy seat in the center of the Cherubim where God will judge His people.
- The tent of meeting was the place where God met with His people.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 7.3: The Sanctuary

Building Block 7:
Discerning Ritual
Details



Objective

Understand the design and holiness of the sanctuary in the Orthodox church.

Application

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states that we are the temple of God. How can we keep this temple clean for God to dwell in?

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ex. 3:5](#), [Galatians 2:9](#), [Revelation 3:12](#), [Ex. 20:26](#), [Ex. 30:29](#)



Liturgy: [The Sunday Theotokia Parts 13-15](#)



Patristics: [St Cyprian](#).



Story: The evolution of church architecture in Egypt, [Coptic Church Architecture](#), [Coptic Church Architecture](#)



Other: [Architecture of the Coptic Church](#), [St Mina COC Pre-Servant Training Seminar Lecture 10](#), [Illustration](#).



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Shapes of the Church

God neither expected nor enforced any architectural style, specific language or culture for His house in the New Testament. He wished it to be in the form of a spiritual structure for believers of diverse backgrounds and cultures coming together. Usually the Church is built as one of three shapes:

- Ship: One of the ways Coptic churches are built is in the form of a ship. This is symbolic of Noah's ark: as those in Noah's ark were saved from the flood, likewise the Church of God alone has the ability to save men. This describes the church in the form of a ship.
- Cross: the cross is symbolic of the Church being under the authority of the Crucified Lord, living with His Law, guided by the Holy Spirit, and preaching the Gospel. In other words, this symbol reveals to the whole world that there is no other message to the Church except to follow the Crucified Christ.
- Circle: This design refers to the eternal nature of the Church as being an endless line. This type is very common in the Coptic architecture.
- According to the Apostolic Constitutions, "the church must be oblong in form and pointing to the East." This tradition was mentioned in the writings of many early Church Fathers such as St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian.
- The church, which is called ecclesia in Greek, meaning "the assembly," was not a building, but it consisted of the people gathered together in liturgical celebration. During the early periods of persecution, Christians tried to deviate attention from themselves by gathering privately in homes of fellow Christians. Jesus is the head of the Church. **"No human being can take God as his Father unless he takes the Church as his mother." St. Cyprian**

+ Heaven on Earth: The Sanctuary

Throughout the lesson, you may, as a type of review with lessons on the Tabernacle of Meeting, see what the youth think it likens in the OT Tabernacle of Meeting (Inner Court, Outer Court, Holy of Holies, the Altar of Incense, The 10 commandments, The Veil, The Showbread, etc...).

- The Sanctuary: is the innermost part of the church behind the iconostasis where the priests and deacons alone were admitted to commemorate the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. The Sanctuary, as viewed by the Orthodox Church, represents heaven itself or God's residence place among His heavenly creatures and saints.
- In the Sanctuary there is the Bosom of the Father: Often occupied with the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ coming on the cloud, carried by the Cherubim and the Seraphim, the four Living creatures, with the twenty four heavenly Presbyters offering incense. The Lord appears holding the planet Earth with one hand, for He is the Almighty one, and the pastoral rod with the other hand, for He is the Shepherd & Redeemer who



liberates men from sin's captivity.

- The following traditions are observed by the church to indicate its reverence:
- Laymen are forbidden to take part in the Communion inside the Sanctuary area.
- We can only step into the Sanctuary bare-footed, in response to the divine commandment to Moses "Take off your shoes... for the place where you stand is holy ground". (Ex 3:5). Taking off the shoes indicates the feeling of unworthiness to be present in such a holy place.
- The church ordains that: "No talking is allowed in the Sanctuary, except for urgent matters"

+ Inside the Sanctuary: The Altar

- The English word 'Altar' is derived from the Latin word 'Altare', which means the place or the sculpture upon which sacrifices are slain. Other names for the Altar e.g. table (the Table of the Lord) and 'Mazbah' in Arabic.
- The Altar materials can be made of wood, stone, or metal.
- The Coptic Altar takes the shape of approximately a cube, which resembles the Tomb of the Lord.
- In the Coptic Church, the choir is usually raised three steps above the rest of the Nave, while the sanctuary is often raised one step above the choir.
- The Altar is never raised above the sanctuary, but is fitted directly on its ground, as directed by the divine commandment (Exod. 20 : 26).
- The Altar has held a distinct sanctity ever since the Early Church. Nothing is placed on it, apart from the Holy Elements, the sacred vessels and the Gospel. Asfour Candlesticks, one is placed on the right side of the Altar, and the other on the opposite side. They refer to the two angels guarding the Lord's Tomb.
- On the surface of the Coptic Altar, an oblong rectangular lot is engraved to a depth of about 2.5 cm., in which a consecrated Altar-Board is loosely embedded. The Board is generally made of wood, or rarely of marble, upon which the following are painted with a Cross or a number of crosses, the first and last Greek letters, A & W and occasionally a few selected psalm such as (Ps. 86 (87): 1, 2) or (Ps. 83: 3)
 - "You shall consecrate them that they may be most Holy, whatever touches them will become Holy". (Exod. 30:29).
- The Altar is then covered with Linen Coverings symbolizing The Lord's burial.
- On the Altar rests:
 - The Chalice: The cup of Blessing
 - The Paten: The Lord's Manger and tomb
 - The Dome (Star): Tomb & Star (Wise men)
 - The Ark/The Seat/The Throne: Presence of crucified Lord
 - Ciborium: Communion
 - Book of Gospel: Word of God

+ Outside the Sanctuary

- Domes: The representations of domes symbolize heaven. Some Coptic churches have one dome, called a cupola. The dome interior is usually painted with the icon of our Lord or in a light blue color decorated with angels and stars. This resembles Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church who is seated in the heavens. Some churches have three cupolas, which represent the Holy Trinity. Other churches have five cupolas. The larger one is located in the center representing our Lord Jesus Christ, and the four smaller ones surrounding it represent the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- Towers: the churches have two towers, mainly found in Coptic monasteries. As ships have a watchtower, the church's towers represent the Lord's ship voyaging towards heaven. The church towers include a belfry, where the bells are hung. The bells replaced the trumpets of the Old Testament. Bells are rung during the offertory, during communion, and on feasts. The bells were also used to call the faithful to go to church.
- Pillars: When walking into the church we sometimes see pillars that are between the aisles. In the New Testament they referred to the disciples of Jesus Christ, usually as twelve pillars in the church. St. Paul called the disciples "pillars" "and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9). Other churches that are not large enough to sustain twelve pillars have four pillars that represent the four evangelists. In ancient churches, columns are decorated with different crowns (capitals). It is rare to find two crowns that are the same, for each one symbolizes those who will be crowned by our Lord, each receiving his own crown. "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name." (Revelation 3:12).
- Ambon: An ambon usually rests on one of the twelve columns, and is made of marble, stone or in most cases, wood. It is a high building that the bishop or priest stands on when preaching to the congregation. It refers to the stone of the Lord's tomb on which the angel sat on and



talked to the women. This is not usually found in modern churches.

- Iconostasis: The iconostasis represents one of the most important architectural features of Orthodox churches. It is a rigid screen made of wood or marble, containing icons of our Lord, His angels and his saints. It lies between the sanctuary and the nave of the church. It contains three doors: the Royal door, which is the entrance to the main sanctuary; and a door on each of the other side for the side sanctuaries.
- Ciborium: The Ciborium is the dome that is seen sheltering the altar with its four pillars. The icon of the Lord with the Seraphim and Cherubim often occupies the center of the dome. It represents the heaven of heavens, where the lord and his heavenly creatures dwell. The icons of the four evangelists are painted on the four pillars that hold up the dome, as if the four corners of the universe are blessed by the word of the Gospel. On top of the dome is a large cross, and sometimes there are another four crosses on the sides, symbolizing the five wounds of our Lord.
- Stairs: there are three steps that are recognizably higher than the rest of the nave. This is the position where the choir is located. This is considered a higher level from the rest of the world. The next step and final step above the choir is the sanctuary, which represents the heavenly Jerusalem. The altar is usually found on the same level as the sanctuary, following the commandment of not going up steps to God's altar. "Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it." (Ex. 20:26)
- The Nave: The nave gets its name from the Latin "naives," meaning a ship. It is usually divided into two parts or "Choirs":
 - The Chancel, or Chorus of Deacons.
 - The Chorus of Believers, or the nave of the church.
 - The chancel is separated from the sanctuary by the iconostasis and from the rest of the nave by a screen or a fence. This is to show a distinction from the sanctuary to the rest of the church.
- The Lectern: (bookstand) is usually wooden with a sloping book rest that is moveable.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 7.4: Symbolism in the Liturgy

Building Block 7: Discerning Ritual Details



Objective

Noticing the deeper meaning in the Liturgy.

Application

As you enter church take note of that which you do not understand and ask questions to your servants.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ex. 12:5](#), [1 Peter 1:19](#), [Matt. 5:23-24](#)



Liturgy: The Holy Liturgy



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom on the Corinthians](#). [St Cyril of Alexandria on St John's Gospel](#)



Story: The first liturgy by St. Mark,



Other: [Understanding the Liturgy, Fr. Athanasius Iskander](#), [Grain and Vine curriculum grade 3 Unit 3](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The Liturgy:

- The Divine Liturgy in the Coptic Orthodox Church is the essence of prayer and group worship.
- The word leitourgia was used in Greek antiquity to describe those services and acts which were performed for the benefit and common interest of all, including acts of worship. Leitourgia is the service offered by the people of God to God. Examples of Liturgies: Liturgy of the Eucharist, Holy Week Pascha, Baptism.
- The Liturgy was first used (verbally) in Alexandria by St. Mark and that it was recorded in writing by St. Cyril I, the 24th Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt. This is the Liturgy known as St. Cyril's Liturgy and from which the other two liturgies – St. Basil's Liturgy and St. Gregory's Liturgy are derived.
- The Eucharist or Divine Liturgy is the central mystery of the Church. The origin of the Eucharist is traced to the Last Supper.

+ The Offertory

- The part of the Liturgy in which the servants offer the bread and the wine by placing them on the altar and the part in which we offer ourselves. In the Offertory Prayer, the priest would examine the loaves of the bread to choose **“a lamb without blemish”** (*Ex. 12:5, 1 Pet. 1:19*).
- While the deacons chant the 41 Kyrie Eleisons, the priest chooses a bread to become the lamb. The bread is round, as He is eternal.
- During the Thanksgiving prayer that follows, the priest mix the wine and the water as a symbol of the mixture of blood and water that came out of the side of Jesus when he was pierced with a spear on the cross
- After the thanksgiving prayer, the pre-epiclesis is prayed (an invocation to the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine) and the altar is then covered by the prosphering. The altar is a symbol of the tomb; the paten symbolize the bier; the bread is the body of our Lord; the veil under the bread is the burial cloth, while the veil covering the bread stands for the cloth which was upon the head and face of Christ (John 20:7). The four hands of the asterisk “hugging” the bread in the paten, symbolize the hands of Joseph and Nicodemus who carried the body of Christ and laid it in the tomb. The prosphering becomes the stone that closes the door of the tomb and the triangular veil on top of it becomes the seal which was put on the stone. [extracted from the book, Understanding the Liturgy]
- In case you wonder why there is this obsession with the death and burial and how it is related to the Eucharist, consider what the Lord said to His disciples: “For every time you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim my death, confess my resurrection and remember me till I come.” Did not the Lord command us saying, “do this in remembrance of me?” Can there be a better way of commemorating His holy passion, his resurrection from the dead -than re-enacting these lifegiving actions by entrenching them in our Eucharistic rites? [extracted from the book,

+ Liturgy of the Word

- The part of the Liturgy that includes all the readings of the day. Also known as the liturgy of the catechumens because the catechumens were allowed to attend that part but would be asked to leave the church there after.
- When the priest is incensing the navel during the reading of the Pauline Epistle symbolizes the spread of the Gospel, through the preaching of St. Paul, all over the world.
- During the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, the priest offers incense around the Altar, then in the chancel but does not circle the whole church. This Signifies The spread of the Gospel through the preaching of the other Apostles, who unlike St. Paul, remained closer to Jerusalem.
- The sermon: The sermon is as old as the Eucharist itself. Justin Martyr(100-165 AD) mentions that after the reading of the “memoirs of the Apostles”(Gospels)is concluded, “The president [bishop presiding at the Eucharist] verbally instructs, and exhorts the imitation of these good things.” It is also interesting to note that in the extended passage,should you read the entire passage in the book, the sunday gatherings, the liturgy of the word, the sermon, the prayer of the believers as well as the eucharist celebration are all mentioned and referred to.

+ In the Liturgy of the Faithful:

- Reconciliation Prayer: A prayer for peace in which the church celebrates the living memorial of the resurrection and exchanges the kiss of peace reconciling with one another. **"Greet one another with a holy kiss"**. On this *St. John Chrysostom* says: **If you have anything against your enemy, get rid of your wrath, heal the wound, let go of your hostility, that you may receive healing from the table. For you are approaching the awesome and holy sacrifice. Show reverence for the goal of the sacrificial offering. The slain offering is Christ. And for whom was He slain, for what purpose? That He might make peace between heaven and earth, to make you a friend of the angels, to reconcile you to the God of all, to make you, an enemy and adversary, a friend. He gave His life to those who hated Him. Will you continue in enmity with your fellow servant? ... Hear at least what He says, When you offer your gift upon the altar, and, standing there before the altar, you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift upon the altar, and go and be reconciled with your brother, and then offer your gift [(Matt. 5:23-24)]. ... For this reason, at the very time of sacrifice He recalls to us no other commandment than that of reconciliation with one's brother.** - *Sermon on the betrayal of Judas.*
- At the end of the Reconciliation Prayer, the Prospherin is lifted. And, since the spreading of the Prospherin at the end of the Offertory was a symbol of the stone that was placed on the door of the tomb, the lifting of the Prospherin becomes an emulation of the angel who rolled the stone from the door of tomb to proclaim the resurrection of our Lord.
- Anaphora: to offer up or to offer back. It is the heart of the Eucharistic Liturgy.The Anaphora leads us to glorify God who is seated in Heaven and has allowed us, through his death and Resurrection as he has now reconciled us to Himself. We give thanks for Him, we proclaim with the angels His holiness in thanksgiving, and we pray to the institution which re-enacts the Last supper.
- The Heavenly Hymn: The thrice holy hymn of the Cherubim and the Worthy hymn of the twenty-four priests in heaven. The cherubim and the seraphim are continually praising saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Your holy glory.” We also praise during the anaphora using the same praise as the cherubim and the seraphim.
- Institution Prayer: Reciting and doing the words and actions of Christ at the first Eucharist
- Anamnesis: The Remembrance of the Paschal Mysteries. The Greek word for "remembrance" is "anamnesis", which means more than just keeping the memory of a departed one. It means reliving an experience. In the Eucharist, we are keeping the memory of our salvation (through the death and resurrection) of our Lord by eating His body which was broken on the cross for us and drinking His blood which was shed on the cross for us.
- Paschal Mysteries: The life, suffering, burial, resurrection, ascension and the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
- Epiclesis: A prayer to ask God the Father to send His Spirit. The priest prays a prayer so that the Holy Spirit descends on the bread and wine transforming them into the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- The litanies: Intercession prayers on behalf of everyone and everything
- Fraction: The prayer during which the body of Christ is broken and offered.

+ Offer and then Receive:

- We offer ourselves in Prayer (Thanksgiving)
- We offer effort: Prepare a night before by attending vespers & midnight praises. Also avoid any earthly distractions (TV, Video games.....). Clean your body & pick your best cloth for the Liturgy.
- We offer materialistic things: Offering money, incense for the church, oblation ingredients.....

- We offer in preparation to receive as we pray in the liturgy: “Remember O Lord, those who have brought/offered unto you these gifts, those on whose behalf they have been brought/offered and those by whom they have been brought/offered”
- And thus we receive a Life Giving Mystery: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, ye have not life in you.” St Cyril of Alexandria on St John's Gospel Chapter 6
- Unity with each other: “For we, who are many, are one bread, one body.” “Why do speak I of communion?” said he, “we are that self-same body.” For what is the bread? The Body of Christ. And what do they become who partake of it? The Body of Christ: not many bodies, but one body. For as the bread consisting of many grains is made one.” St. John Chrysostom on I Corinth 10:16
- And finally receive: Forgiveness of the sins.

+ How to Prepare:

- The Eucharistic Fasting: We fast 9 hours before Communion. We fast because we are invited to eat at the Table of the Lord.
- On the day before Taking communion, we prepare by attending vespers prayers, sleeping early, washing our body and confessing our sins.
- “Prayer Before Communion.” In this prayer I ask our Lord to help me be ready to receive Him into my body and Hid Blood.
- We should keep a spirit of reverence and prayer rather than talk to anyone or look around at anyone. We learn to use the corporal on our hands to receive any pieces of the Body (Jewels) that fall during communion. When we receive the Blood, we make sure not to touch our lips out of reverence until water is consumed.
- We pray the “Prayer After Communion” in which I thank our Lord for the gift of His most precious body and blood.
- The day of communion, we do everything we can to keep reverence and respect the Body & the Blood of Christ in us & behave accordingly.



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 7.5: Christ foreshadowed in the 5 OT offerings

Building Block 7:
Discerning Ritual
Details



Objective

Understanding what the Old Testament sacrifices and offering are and the reason for them. How we can see Christ in them.

Application

Contemplate on how a Christian should live his or her life as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1) that is a “sweet-smelling aroma” to God as Christ was (Ephesians 5:2). Our lives should be “spiritual sacrifices” that God will accept (1 Peter 2:5).

References and Resources



Scripture: [John 6:38](#), [Philippians:2:8](#), [Psalm 116:17](#), [Matthew 5:13](#), [Hebrews 9:22](#), [Isaiah 53:6](#), [John:1:29](#), [Hebrews 7:27](#), [Hebrews 9:13](#), [Hebrews 7:26](#), [Isaiah 53:7](#), [Malachi 1:8](#)



Liturgy: [The Offering and Procession of the Oblations](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom on The Gospel of St. John](#)



Story: [The crucifixion](#)



Other: [The Cross Revealed in the Old testament Offerings, Article by HG Bishop Youssef](#); [Legacy Curriculum Grade 9 Great Fast Week 2 and 3](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Old Testament Offerings

Consider discussing: What was the purpose of the offering? What was the sacrifice intended to symbolize? What did this sacrifice reveal about a holy God's relationship with sinful men? In what ways has the death of Christ altered this sacrifice?

- One of the most interesting and intriguing topics in the Old Testament is the sacrifices or offerings that God the Almighty had ordered the Israelites to present to Him; and their direct relation to the grand offering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross.
- Offering: is a general term that refers to anything offered to God whether in worship or only in fulfillment of His command. For example, anise and cumin were to be offered according to God's command and not for the sake of worship.
- Sacrifice: is the term given to the offering when it involves shedding of blood.
- Oblation: is the term given to the offering when no blood shed is involved but the oblation here is meant for worship only. Korban which is derived from the verb kureb is also used and it means bring to God in worship.

+ There were 5 Types of Sacrifices :

- I. Burnt Offering: offered with an animal, a male without blemish.
 - This offering symbolizes the divine aspect of the Cross Offering. This Sacrifice is the first and most important one, because it is offered all to the Lord and burned all on the altar as a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. This sacrifice shows the most important aspect of the sacrifice of the cross, which is the complete obedience of the Son to God the Father.
 - “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” (John 6:38)
 - “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians:2:8)
 - St. John Chrysostom encourage us to offer our lives as a burnt offerings Martyrs have offered their souls and bodies as burnt offering, we may also be able to offer burnt offering to God, if we can't offer our bodies as burnt offering with fire, we can do that by a different type of fire such as voluntary poverty, or crucifying our lusts.
 - Bring Sacrifice to the door of the Tabernacle, puts hands on it, confesses sins thereby transferring sins onto the sacrifice. When a person entered the front door of the tabernacle, the first thing he would meet would be the altar of the burnt sacrifice. The person would offer his lamb (or animal) at the door of the tabernacle, so that the priests could examine it. If it is acceptable, they would enter the

tabernacle and offer it on the altar. But if not approved of, the offering would not enter the tabernacle.

- Unlike the other sacrifices, in this sacrifice, the entire sacrifice is burned with fire and no one eats from it. This is so in order to show, first, that the Son accepted in full the fire of the divine wrath against sin, drinking the cup of suffering to its full. In Gethsemane, He said, "My soul is grieved even unto death" (Matthew 26:38). And on the Cross, He experienced suffering in its fullness. This Sacrifice belongs to God in full as a sweet smelling aroma. When the church praises the Sunday Theotokia, they speak Christ being this sacrifice and this sweet smelling aroma.
- The priest then sprinkles blood around the altar. This is a symbol that this sacrifice is killed for the whole world. It's sprinkled in a circle, so as to show that there is no limit to its redemptive work. Likewise the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ has no limit; it is offered for all sins, all people, at all ages. In the Divine Liturgy, after the examination process, the priest takes the Lamb and goes around the altar in a circle.
- 2. Peace Offering: offered with an animal also, either male or female.
 - This offering symbolizes the human aspect of the Cross in the sense that the Cross accomplished peace between God and humanity. That is why the offering could be either male or female.
 - Peace Offering (also known as offering of completion) This is offered to God as an expression of Thanksgiving. It is the most sacrifice associated with joy and gladness, because it was allowed for the person and the priests to eat of it in the presence of God of peace and reconciliation with God.
 - The peace sacrifice was offered for thanksgiving to God, and the sacrament of the communion is called the sacrament of Eucharist = thanksgiving.
- 3. Sin Offering: offered with an animal, either male or female.
 - It's a Burnt offering, which accompanies the sin sacrifice, which is offered by a group which sinned unintentionally. The person brings fine flour; pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it.
 - It is offered outside the Tabernacle for God could not look at the sacrifice that bore the sins of the offerers. This sacrifice to save the offeror from his sins by transferring the sins onto the sacrifice.
 - Aaron's sons the priests take this and burn it upon the altar, to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet aroma unto the Lord.
 - "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:17).
- 4. Trespass Offering: offered with an animal either male or female.
 - This offering is assigned for those who have sinned unintentionally or out of ignorance; or anyone who felt was in such a situation that required a sacrifice of that kind. In these sacrifices we see the Son of God carrying our sins to pay for our debts. Like the Sin Sacrifice it is offered outside the camp/Tabernacle.
- 5. Grain offering: offered with grain or wheat, baked in the frying pan.
 - It shall be made of fine flour with oil. The grain offering was usually offered together with sacrifices. Symbols in this sacrifice: Salt protects from corruption, a symbol of covenant and promise. "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). No Leaven - (Leaven is a symbol of evil, wickedness, and hypocrisy) because He was sinless. No Honey - because it is a symbol of self-indulgence and sweet talk.
- + General characteristics of these sacrifices that pointed out to the sacrifice of Christ:
 - 1. The blood was the king's seal, where everything is consecrated with it.
 - "According to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22)
 - Thus we may appreciate the value of shedding the blood of our Lord as atonement for the life of the whole world.
 - 2. The sacrifice must be an animal without logic (Thoughtless) That is, it cannot sin or trespass and therefore it can substitute for the sinner.
 - Being unable to sin is another symbol to Christ who is without sin. "All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6)
 - "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)
 - 3. The sacrifices need to be offered every day.
 - Because of its corrupt nature, it has only a temporary effect, since it is the blood of bulls and of goats. Thus, it points out to the need of a permanent sacrifice, a sacrifice that can remain alive.
 - "Who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:27)
 - "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead

works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13)

- St John Chrysostom explained; That is, "that nothing was wanting to the Dispensation." For He was everywhere desirous to show, that this Death was of a new kind, if indeed the whole lay in the power of the Person dying, and death came not on the Body before He willed it; and He willed it after He had fulfilled all things. Therefore also He said, "I have power to lay down My life; and I have power to take it again." (c. x. 18.) Knowing therefore that all things were fulfilled, He saith, "I thirst." St John Chrysostom on The Gospel of St John
- 4. There are so many types of offerings mentioned in the book of Leviticus.
 - This reflects the nature of sin and its complexity, which required many sacrifices and offerings. All these point out to the sacrifice of Christ which could not be completed with only one sacrifice.
- 5. The continuous presence and smell of death, blood, fire in the tabernacle, exemplified to the Israelites the awfulness of sin and its consequences

+ Types of animal used as sacrifices:

- 1. Must be clean: i.e. of the types of animals that were allowed to be eaten.
 - A symbol of eating from the body of Christ. Also the sacrifice can not be given from unclean animals, such as flesh-eating animals because they feed on the death of other animals, which can not symbolize Christ who gave Himself for others.
 - Pure a symbol of Christ "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26)
- 2. It has to be a domestic animal, which is not hunted, because the hunted animal runs away and is brought reluctantly to the slaughter, unlike the domestic animal that is submissive, obedient and surrendering.
 - Thus symbolizing our good Savior.
 - "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)
 - Without blemish Or else it would be rejected.
 - The priest used to examine every part very carefully, even after it is sacrificed, he would examine its bone, meat and the inside, until he is completely sure that it is without blemish, then he lights the offering.
 - Just as in the liturgy when the oblations are offered and examined while the congregation chants "Lord have mercy" (41 times)
 - This is similar to Christ who is without sin. "And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 1:8).



Building Block 8: The Bible and You: Discerning Practical Answers

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 8.I: Problem Solving: Nehemiah's Model

Building Block 8: The Bible and You: Discerning Practical Answers



Objective

Understanding problem solving is one of the most important skills of a good leader.

Application

Think of ways to do God's work with zeal, bravery, and optimism with the Lord following Nehemiah's example.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Nehemiah 1:11-2:1](#), [James 4: 1-3](#), [2 Corinthians 12:7](#), [2 Corinthians 12:9](#), [Nehemiah 4:16-18](#), [Nehemiah 5:14](#), [Nehemiah 1:1-3](#), [Nehemiah 6:15](#), [Nehemiah 6:3](#), [Nehemiah 6:9](#).



Liturgy: [\(Aqpeya\) Prayer for God's Guidance](#)



Patristics: [Athanasius the Apostolic, Synopsis on Nehemiah](#)



Story: Nehemiah; St. Paul



Other: [Problems and Solutions](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Who is Nehemiah?

Provide an overview of how he got to lead the project of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. Conflict and challenges he faced and how he was able to overcome them.

- Nehemiah served in the Persian royal court as the personal cupbearer to King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11-2:1). This prestigious position reveals Nehemiah's upright character.
- He led the third of three returns by the Jewish people to Jerusalem following their seventy years of exile in Babylon (after Ezekiel and Daniel); this group started the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem.
- He was a layman, not a priest like Ezra nor a prophet like Malachi. Under Nehemiah's leadership, the Jews withstood opposition and came together to accomplish their goal.
- Nehemiah led by example, giving up a respected position in a palace for hard labor in a politically insignificant district. He partnered with Ezra, to solidify the political and spiritual foundations of the people.
- He was humble before God; he did not claim glory for himself but always gave God credit for his successes. He and Ezra directed the political and religious restoration of the Jews in their homeland after the Babylonian captivity. He exhibited a steadfast determination to complete his goals. Accomplishing those goals resulted in people being encouraged, renewed, and excited about their future after many years of captivity.
- Nehemiah is the last historical book of the Old Testament.

+ Godly Problem Solving Strategies:

- Appealing to the Word of God: The Scripture is the manual to diagnosing and fixing problems. God, our manufacturer, gave us His Word to help us through our hardships. Being well versed in the Holy Bible in order to acquire the mind of Christ will help uncover the will of God and arrive at solutions.
- Applying the Word of God: Knowledge of the Scripture should be accompanied with compliance and application of necessary rules and precepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and love which are of paramount importance in solving problems. Nowhere do we find a book recommending taking the last seat and becoming the servant of all except in the Holy Bible.
- Putting away one's ego: Selfishness and stubbornness are stumbling blocks to problem solving. Conflicts always start from a selfish motive (James 4: 1-3). St. Paul is an example to follow in bearing "the thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7) and rejoicing in his "infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). That was a safeguard against self exaltation that could result from the abundance of



revelations and visions.

+ Tools that Nehemiah used to aid in solving problems:

- Positiveness In Work: Notice the persistence and insistence and hard work, which lead to success. “So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me (Nehemiah 4:16-18).
- Dedication and Zeal: “They worked with one hand and carried weapons with the other hand.” (These are the attitudes of the children of God. They divide their time between studying and prayers. The Lord heard the prayer and blessed the work.)
- Rejecting Luxury, Selfishness And Exploiting The Post: A model of leadership and shouldering responsibility that should be followed and not exploiting the post for private interests: “Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions” (Nehemiah 5:14). Also consider that Nehemiah gladly accepted the leadership efforts of others and did not oppose with ego: “On the other hand, he relates more things concerning Nehemiah the eunuch, how he too asked for the building of the temple, and how Ezra performed the function of a scribe, while Josue, Baneas and Habia instructed the people.” - Athanasius

+ Nehemiah and The Steps to Problem Solving

1. Identify the Problem:

- He first identified the problem (Nehemiah 1:1,3), and came to the conclusion that sin, spiritual ailments with the resultant despair, hopelessness and helplessness, lack of leadership, lack of resources and local opposition led his people, the Israelites, into the seventy years of captivity. A problem on the surface is only an external manifestation of a hidden one. Analyzing and identifying the problem is essential in order to avoid hasty solutions.

2. Express feelings and return to God

- Not sparing his tears, he wept and prayed fervently before the Lord in order to know His Divine will. Expressing wounded feelings in the form of grieving, weeping, or just talking the problem over with a friend or the Spiritual Father can help accelerate the healing process and energize the individual to start all over again. We should aim to make prayers to God to aid us, either a prayer to God to implement my decisions and execute my plans in solving my problems or a prayer to God asking for His will to be done even if His will does not coincide with personal desires. Our Agpeya has many prayers to help us seek God's guidance in different situations. In addition, prayer generates faith and reduces anxiety.

3. Explore several possible solutions and set a plan and time frame:

- Then, he came up with a proactive time framed action plan in which he divided the people into groups (Nehemiah 6:15). Motivating them, he participated in the work with them. There are endless solutions to problems; the best solution is the one that involves and incorporates God's will. In order to ensure success in problem solving, a plan followed by a time frame for executing the plan should be set in order to establish urgency and commitment in implementing solutions.

+ Nehemiah dealing with the plots against him.

- Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem put their heads together and plotted to destroy the great work.
- Nehemiah refused to negotiate with them saying, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3).
- They all wanted to frighten us thinking, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (Nehemiah 6:9).
- Should such a man as I flee? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not gain. (A model of true manhood. Manhood does not mean imitating those indifferent corrupt young men but it means determination and holding-fast to principles).
- He prayed for his enemy. This is the spirit of the Children of God.
- When the wall had been rebuilt I appointed an honest man who feared God to be in charge of it. This is the spirit of responsibility. The best man in administration should be chosen.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 8.2: God Cares About You

Building Block 8:
The Bible and You:
Discerning Practical
Answers



Objective

Understanding of God's care that leads to trusting Him.

Application

Strive to reciprocate this love to God and mimic this love to others around you in the same ways.
“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35)
Jesus teaches that love for one another is an indicator that we are truly disciples of Jesus. Examine yourself if you are a true disciple and take action to be one.

References and Resources



Scripture: [2 Kings 4:1-7](#), [Mark 6:30-44](#), [Mark 8:1-10](#), [Philippians 4:19](#), [Zechariah 2:8](#), [Matthew 6:25-33](#), [Hebrews 4:15-16](#), [Romans 5:8](#), [Luke 12:7](#), [Psalm 56:8](#), [Hebrews 13:5](#), [Isaiah 41:13](#), [Philippians 4:6-7](#), [Psalm 51: 17](#), [John 3:16](#), [Romans 5:8](#), [John 15:13](#)



Liturgy: [Gregorian Liturgy \(Anaphora Second prayer before Institution Narrative\)](#) & [Basilian Liturgy \(Agios\)](#) & [Great Fast Doxology for the Weekends](#), [Thanksgiving prayer](#), [Great Fast Weekday Praxis Response](#)



Patristics: [Hilary of Poitiers](#)



Story: [Saint Nicholas](#), [Saint Marina of Antioch](#)



Other: [Legacy Curriculum: Grade 6, Week 3 of October](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

Consider having this discussion: What words come to your mind when I say the word “Love.” Why do you think that love is so powerful and important? There is one who has mastered love, read Romans 8:38-39. Were you surprised by any parts of the verse? Why do you think it is hard for some to believe that God loves them? Has there ever been a time when you worried that God might not love you? If so, why? Nothing can separate you from God’s love. How does it make you feel to know that nothing can separate you from God’s love? The whole bible is a reflection of how much God cares about us.

+ God as the Provider

- 2 Kings 4:1-7, Mark 6:30-44, Mark 8:1-10: Many times in the bible we see God providing for the innumerable and crowds as well the hidden and lowly.
- Philippians 4:19, Zechariah 2:8, Matthew 6:25-33: Likewise, He assures us that we shall receive his providence as well.
- We also see His providence through His saints, for example, Saint Nicholas:
 - St. Nicholas was the Bishop of Mora. He was filled with Divine grace from a young age.
 - He had so much empathy and love for everyone. He is the true personality behind the story of St. Claus, who leaves presents for children on Christmas Eve.
 - He drove out the devil and evil spirits from people. God gave him the gift to work signs and wonders and heal the sick. He blessed little bread to satisfy many people, with much more leftover.
 - When Diocletian arrested him, Saint Nicholas wasn't concerned for himself but rather for his congregation; he wrote to them from prison to teach, encourage and confirm them in the faith.

+ God as the Helper and Protector

- Luke 12:7, Psalm 56:8, Hebrews 13:5, Isaiah 41:13: He remembers our hardships, and reassures us that He will help us and He will never leave nor forsake us.
- He guards us and gives us a sense of security in this chaotic world: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." - Philippians 4:6-7

- Also referenced in the Great Fast Weekday Liturgy Gospel Response. (+ Thanksgiving Prayer: "...For He has covered us, helped us, guarded us, accepted us to Himself, spared us, supported us, and have brought us to this hour...")
- We see these protections and assistance in His saints and martyrs, for example, St. Marina of Antioch :
 - The governor offered her the worship of the idols and asked her to forsake God, but she refused. She told him, "I am Christian. I believe in the Lord Christ.
 - He ordered her body to be tortured. Nevertheless, she endured with patience. Immediately the angel of the Lord came and healed all her wounds.
 - While she was standing up praying, a huge and terrifying serpent came forth. The serpent swallowed her up, and her soul almost departed from her. She made the sign of the cross and prayed while she was in the belly of the serpent. It split open and fell to the ground dead. St. Marina went out unharmed.
 - The governor ordered his soldiers to fill a large cauldron with melted lead to immerse St. Marina in it. She asked the Lord to make this a baptism for her. The Lord sent his angel in the form of a dove, and a voice from heaven called her and said, "O Marina, you have been baptized in the baptismal water." She rejoiced exceedingly, and those who were present heard what had happened to the saint. Many of them believed.

+ God as the Forgiver

- Hebrews 4:15-16, Romans 5:8: If we seek Him, He will forgive us our sins.
- Although sins are abhorrent in His sight, "God takes away the sins of the people..." (Great Fast Weekday Praxis Response) for those willing to put in sincere effort; "A broken and humbled heart God shall not despise" - Psalm 51:17
- Even the most pungent sinners have been saved through God's forgiveness; we should aspire to be like these in sincerity and experience God's love for ourselves. " ... / Make me like the publican, who has sinned against You, You had compassion upon him, and forgave him his sins. / Make me like the adulteress, whom You have redeemed, You have saved and rescued her, for she pleased You. / Make me like the thief, who was crucified upon Your right-hand, he confessed to You, and likewise said. / 'Remember me O my Lord, remember me O my God, remember me O my King, when You come into Your kingdom.' / For You O my Savior, have accepted his confession, You were compassionate to him, and sent him to paradise. / Likewise I the sinner, Jesus my true King and God, have compassion upon me, and make me as one of them. / ... / Do not send me to the fire, for my ignorance like Sodom, and likewise do not destroy me, like Gomorrah. / But O my Lord deal with me, like the people of Nineveh, those who have repented, and You forgave them their sins. / ..." (Great Fast Weekend Doxology)

+ God as the Sacrifice

- John 3:16, Romans 5:8: "If it were only a creature given up for the sake of a creature, such a poor and insignificant loss were no great evidence of love. They must be precious things which prove our love, great things must evidence its greatness. God, in love to the world, gave His Son, not an adopted Son, but His own, even His Only Begotten. Here is proper Son ship, birth, truth: no creation, no adoption, no lie: here is the test of love and charity, that God sent His own and only begotten Son to save the world." - Hilary of Poitiers
- He gave up Himself up to free us from death, a true sign of love: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." - John 15:13 (+ Basilian & Gregorian Anaphora prayers before Institution Narrative ["Agios"])
 - Gregorian Liturgy (Anaphora Second prayer before Institution Narrative): "You, O my Master, have turned for me the punishment into salvation."
 - Basilian Liturgy: "He loved His own who were in the world, and, as a ransom on our behalf, gave Himself unto death, which reigned over us, whereby we were bound and sold on account of our sins"
- Through the Eucharist, He is sacrificed again for our sake; we are reunited with Him through the Holy Communion, and we receive that goodness of His and shed off the sins that hold us back from God.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 8.3: Violence in the Old Testament

Building Block 8:
The Bible and You:
Discerning Practical
Answers



Objective

To understand that God's nature has remained consistent, loving, and holy. God is not violent, rather, both a merciful savior and a righteous judge simultaneously.

Application

Do not glorify and enjoy violence, but rather realize God's Love, grow from it, and mimic it towards others. "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights." (Proverbs 3:11-12)

References and Resources



Scripture: [Hebrews 13:8](#); [Ezekiel 18:21-23](#); [2 Chronicles 16:9](#)



Liturgy: [Gregorian Liturgy Anaphora](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom Commentary on Job](#)



Story: [The Flood](#); [Sodom and Gomorrah](#)



Other: [Why is the Bible, the story of salvation & love, filled with violence? \(Violence in the OT – part 2\), Why is there violence in the Old Testament? Fr. Gabriel Wissa](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Old Testament History

- "The Bible is a shared work between God and humanity, where God allows men and women of God to write down what He wills. However, what they write down, especially in the historical section of the Old Testament, is according to the reality they lived in. Unfortunately, that was a very ugly and violent reality! That's why the Old Testament is full of violence! Because humanity lived in such a fallen state of sin."
- "In addition, we should understand that not everything was written in the Old Testament (the New Testament either) ... [The Old Testament has] 0.57 chapters per year; which is very little. Now we can easily tell that this is relatively nothing. Most of the events that occurred in the Old Testament were not written. The events that were written were the ones that really affected the Jews at that time. The events that made their history ... Although the Old Testament is not all about violence, the many events that were written were the ones that really impacted the history of the Jews. And these events were often violent because of the fallen reality they lived in. The other events, the ones related to God's mercy and love weren't all written down simply because they were day-to-day events. It was nothing abnormal."
- "Nowadays, when you watch or read the daily NEWS, are the headlines mainly positive or negative? And to what proportion? I believe it is safe to say that the headlines are mainly negative. Today's NEWS consists of a long list of murders, crimes, fires, wars, lies, allegations, corruptions, and the like. Similarly, looking at the Old Testament, while applying this NEWS principle, will lead us to a surprising conclusion... In fact, we can assume that God, through His servants, only recorded the critical events. There was no significant event worth describing in the remainder 364 days a year; therefore, we can generally assume it was the day-to-day life where everything is as usual. "No NEWS is good NEWS," as they say. Typically, we can assume that the usual days involved humankind sinning (as we do everyday), while God remained tolerant, patient and merciful for days, weeks, months, years and decades! The fact that God's mercy was not sufficiently recorded in the Old Testament is by no means a reason to believe that He was not All-Loving."

+ God's Unchanging Nature: Love in the Old Testament

- Often, when passages are read out of context, God's actions do appear wrathful, but closer contextual examination shows that God balances His justice with mercy all through the Bible. Understanding the pattern of God's patience and His judgment can be found in a few key verses. Some of the acts that appeared angry or violent were acts of fatherly discipline, and others righteous judgment that He would have stayed had they been willing to repent.
- "Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8
- God Himself does not change over time since He is above time. The "violent, wrathful Old Testament God" is still the same God as the loving,

caring "New Testament God" without any change.

- Gregorian Anaphora: "It is fitting indeed, and right, that we praise You, serve You, worship You, and glorify You, the one, only, true God, the Lover of Mankind, ineffable, invisible, infinite, without beginning, everlasting, timeless, immeasurable, incomprehensible, unchangeable, Creator of all, Savior of everyone."
- Jonah 4:2, II; Exodus 34:6-7; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 103:6-8; Jeremiah 9:24; Matthew 22:37-40: We see God's Love in the Old Testament through Jonah and people of Nineveh, and the prophets who were close to him; His entire law was founded in love.
- When God's anger & wrath are referenced, they are not the sinful wrath of mankind, but rather a characterization of God's strong displeasure with sin. "There's one thing that is worse than evil, and that is indifference to evil, to remain unmoved by wrongs done to people. God is not indifferent to evil. He is personally affected by what we do to others. When the Bible speaks of God's anger, it means that God is not indifferent to evil. It would be hard to worship a God who sits serenely by and is not affected when His children are abused or wronged." - Can a loving God be Wrathful?, Fr. Anthony Coniaris, p20.
- God is unchanging, but His ways are also higher than our ways. It can be difficult to read about people suffering, dying in battle, or cultures being wiped out. Even though people always hurt God by sinning and rebelling against Him, He waits patiently for them to come to Him. In His good time, He sent His only Son to pay the price for the sins of all humanity.

+ Examples from the Bible:

- Sometimes, in the Old Testament, whole cultures, nations, and people groups hardened their hearts so much that God sent His judgment. Sodom and Gomorrah were two such cities. Abraham asked God to spare the cities if ten righteous men could be found, but only Lot's family was spared.
- While Noah constructed the ark, which was immense and took time, people around him had a chance to re-evaluate, ask questions, and turn, but they did not. When the ark was finished, it took time for the animal pairs to arrive, and then the Bible says, "And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth." (Genesis 7:10) . In order to allow any good, righteous people to thrive, people had to change their ways. But they would not.
- When the time came from the Hebrew people to leave the wilderness and enter the promised land, God helped them take down the walls of the great city of Jericho. While this incident was a display of God's power, it was also a demonstration of His patience. Before they ever set foot near the walls, Joshua sent spies into the city. A prostitute named Rahab sheltered those spies, and informed them, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath." (Joshua 2:8-11)
- The citizens of Jericho knew about the 10 plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, as well as the defeats of kings who tried to eliminate the Hebrews. The parting of the Red Sea was at least forty years prior to the spies going into Jericho. The people in the land knew for decades that a God more powerful than their own was working miracles, and Rahab even said her people knew the land belonged to the Hebrews. They had forty years to turn to that God, as Rahab did. Instead they locked themselves in the walled city. Not only did Rahab put her faith in the true God and survive - demonstrating His mercy - she became a part of the ancestry of Jesus Christ.

+ Humanity's Growth as the Perceived Change

- Judges 14:12-15:6 Humanity used to be cruel and unloving. "For instance, the Greek author and historian Herodotus; says the following about king Darius: "Thus as Babylon [was] taken for the second time. Darius, having become master of the place, destroyed the wall, and tore down all the gates; for Cyrus had done neither the one nor the other when he took Babylon. He then chose out near three thousand of the leading citizens, and caused them to be crucified." Darius crucified over three thousand people in one event! Again, history speaks about Alexander the Great. The first century historian Curtius Rufus says that Alexander the Great took over two thousand people and crucified them in one single event as well. We have to understand that the history of humanity is full of violence. This violence isn't specific to Christianity or Judaism, but it is general to humanity at that time."
- Even though bad things still happen now, we see that humanity has grown and is still growing: 'Some could argue that the same type of Old Testament violence is in effect today. Although this statement is true, this barbaric violence is present in exceptional cases like in certain third-world countries, street gangs, or occasionally in the teachings of other religions. The main difference is that at the time, it was a general way of life; today, violence is rejected by most of the world. For example, in the Old Testament all the kings went to war: "It happened in the spring of the year, at the time kings go out to battle, that Joab led out the armed forces and ravaged the country of the people of Ammon, and



came and besieged Rabbah..."As you see, there was a season for the kings to go out to battle. This was the custom. Today, engaging in war is highly rebuked by most countries.'

- 'Humanity, in the Old Testament, was at a very, very low level, but it was growing. And as it was growing, God changed His laws to adapt to His people. We can see this in Matthew 5:38-39: "You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth. But I tell you not to resist an evil person but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." In other words, what God is saying is: "I have told you an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth in the Old Testament because you did not understand better, so I gave you a commandment to your level. But now, in the New Testament, I am giving you the Holy Spirit to help you live this new law, which will bring you to a much higher level."

+ God and War

- Isaiah 2:2-5; I Chronicles 22:7-8; Matthew 5:38-48: God disapproves of war and violence, instead He calls us to a higher calling to dissolve the enmity with our fellow men.
- Genesis 3:17: "The creation [of humans] was good as we were created in the image and likeness of God. However, as already explained, mankind distorted this perfect image through free will and humanity sank to such dreadful levels of cruelty and violence. God did not want to leave humanity this way, and He worked with them through the establishment of the commandments. Once again, we should remind ourselves that God does not force humans to obey Him, but gives us the free will to love Him or not. He simply puts the laws as a guide and wishes for us to follow them; however, it is up to us to honor or dishonor them. Hence, throughout the Old Testament, our longsuffering God worked with humans at their level and progressively brought them up. God allowed wars not because He delighted in them, but because He was working with such a distorted image of humankind."
- Ezekiel 18:21, 23; Job 19:7: Sometimes, these hardships are permitted to let the afflicted change and grow; "Job wants to suggest in this passage that if he was suffering so much, it was not because of his faults—in fact, if God strikes one, does one always suffer because of his faults? Not Job, and not many others—but in order to be tested and to achieve more victories." - John Chrysostom

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 8.4: Bible and Women: Is the Bible Prejudice Against Women?

Building Block 8: The Bible and You: Discerning Practical Answers



Objective

Provide an overview of women's roles in the Old and the New Testaments.

Application

As Christ sees and treats us as equals, mimic this display to others and love others like He does.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Genesis 1:26-27](#), [John 4:38-40](#), [Genesis 2:18-20](#), [Galatians 3:26-29](#), [Matthew 9:20-22](#), [John 8:1-11](#), [Luke 8:1-3](#), [Judges 5:1-31](#), [Judges 4:10-24](#), [Esther 7:1-6](#), [Esther 7: 9-10](#), [Esther 8:8](#), [Exodus 15:20-21](#), [John 4:10-26](#), [John 2:3-5](#), [Luke 10:38-42](#), [Matthew 27-28](#)



Liturgy: [Theotokias \(Especially the Resurrection Theotokias \(Parts 16-18\)\)](#)



Patristics: [John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [St. Verena](#), [St. Hilaria](#), [St. Marina](#), [St. Mary of Egypt](#).



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Jesus and Women

Consider having this discussion: Does the Bible Address Women's Rights? What was the view of women in New Testament times? [Females, like males, are made in God's likeness and image according to Genesis 1:27. In Galatians 3:23-29 there is neither male nor female in Christ. Often, Jesus' interaction with women flowed against the tradition and understanding of society.]

- The Gospel stories show Jesus' view of this matter: He spoke to the Samaritan women in public and risked public disgrace.
- He had women as close friends, discussed theology with them, and even trusted women with the news of His resurrection.
- He affirmed the courage of a woman with a menstrual disorder for coming out in public in hope of obtaining healing by touching His garments.
- He challenged women's traditional service role when he told Martha that Mary had the right idea when she preferred to sit and learn from Him rather than doing housework.

+ List examples of women in the Old Testament

- From the beginning God created men and women equally in the image of God: *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* - Genesis 1:26-27
- Prophetess Mariam, Deborah, Queen Esther, and The records of the kings of Judah always note or name the queen mothers.

+ Can you name a few women from the New Testament?

- Jesus and women in the New Testament and their role in preaching the good news. After the Samaritan woman met Jesus, she went back to her village and started telling everybody about Him: *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans had come to Him, they urged Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days.* - John 4:38-40
- God chose St. Mary to be his mother and entrusted her with bringing up Jesus.
- The Apostle Paul had high regard for women. Many of those greeted in the last chapter of Romans were women. Phoebe was especially mentioned as one who had greatly helped the church at Cenchrea (verses 1-2). Paul's teaching on the marriage relationship greatly enhanced the position of the married woman (Eph. 5:22-33).



+ Women in God's eyes

- Genesis 2:18-20: Men and Women are equal in God's eyes.
- Galatians 3:26-29: God doesn't make a distinction between male and female or judge based on race, but we are all one in Christ.
- Matthew 9:20-22, John 8:1-11, Luke 8:1-3: Christ Himself healed, defended, and depended on women throughout his time on earth.

+ Women as Strong, Respected Leaders of the People in the Bible

- Judges 5:1-31: Deborah the Judge and her attack on Sisera: The Canaanite King Jabin of Hazor defeated Israel and ruled for twenty years. His army's commander was Sisera, who, for twenty years, had harshly oppressed the children of Israel. Deborah – a prophetess and leader of the Israelites, sends for Barak and tells him, 'I have a message for you from the LORD' take ten thousand men to defeat Sisera. Deborah and Barak assemble the Israelite troops and line them up on the lower slopes of Mount Tabor. When Sisera attacked, Deborah shouted: Barak, it's time to attack Sisera! Because today the LORD is going to help you defeat him. The LORD has already gone on ahead to fight for you. Barak led his 10,000 troops down from Mount Tabor. And during the battle, the LORD confused Sisera, his chariot drivers, and his whole army. Everyone was so afraid of Barak and his army that even Sisera jumped down from his chariot and tried to escape. (Judges 4:10-24).
- Esther: Esther saves her people from being exterminated (Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, Esther 8:8).
- Judith: Judith destroys an Assyrian General

+ Women as Spiritual Leaders in the Bible

- Exodus 15:20-21: Miriam and her song
- John 4:10-26: Samaritan woman and her preaching
- John 2:3-5: St. Mary and the Miracle at the Wedding of Cana of Galilee (St. Mary in the Theotokias emphasizes all her splendor from bearing Christ our Savior)
- Luke 10:38-42: Mary and Martha "It is not said of Mary simply that she sat near Jesus, but at His feet, to show her diligence, steadfastness, and zeal, in hearing, and the great reverence which she had for our Lord." - John Chrysostom.
- Matthew 27:28: The Three Marys of the Burial and Mary Magdalene at the Resurrection (Resurrection Theotokias mention this as well).
- Priscilla with Aquila: Equality in Marriage and Women in the ministry.
- The Sunday Theotokia during the Resurrection specifically parts 16-18 mention St. Mary Magdalene and her importance of finding the tomb empty after Jesus' Resurrection and she was the first to go and tell everyone that Christ had risen. It could've been one of the disciples but she was chosen to be the first to see the empty tomb. Therefore this is a great example of how women are truly valued in the eyes of God.

+ Records of Christian Women outside the Bible

- St. Verena and the Theban Legion (Who is St. Verena...and what is her story?) and countless other women martyrs (St. Marina of Antioch, St. Catherine of Alexandria, etc.). Saint Verena was brought up in modern-day Luxor (Upper Egypt) in a Christian family. She was handed over to Bishop Sherimon, who taught her and baptized her. She joined a legion in its mission to modern-day Switzerland. When Saint Maurice, Saint Victor and the other members of the Theban legion were martyred, Saint Verena led a lonely and hermit life. She used to fast and pray continuously, and God performed several miracles through her. She was particularly concerned over young girls and looked after them spiritually and physically due to her expertise as a nurse. She served the poor and enjoyed serving the sick, especially those suffering from leprosy. God worked several miracles through her prayers. Due to her, many converted to Christianity.
- St. Hilaria (Toba 21 : Lives of Saints : Synaxarium) and St Marina the Ascetic (St. Marina) and countless other ascetics:
- Emperor Zeno was an Orthodox believer who loved the church. He had only two daughters, Hilaria and her sister, Thaepesta. Their father brought them up and taught them the fundamentals of the Orthodox faith. Hilaria loved to live a solitary life from a young age, and she thought about the monastic life. When she was 18 years old, she left her father's court and traveled to Egypt, disguised in men's clothing. She went to the wilderness of St. Macarius, and she was ordained a monk under the name of Hilary. She stayed there for fifteen years. Meanwhile, her sister Thaepesta became possessed by an unclean spirit. Her father spent a great deal of money on her in vain. The Emperor sent her to the elders of Sheheat (Scetis). They prayed for her for many days, but she was not healed. In the end, St. Hilary (Hilaria, her sister) prayed for her, and God healed her. Then the Emperor wrote to the Governor of Egypt, demanding him to send wheat, oil and all that the monks needed in the wilderness every year. The Emperor commanded the building of many cells for the monks. From that time on, the number of monks increased in the wilderness.
- St. Mary of Egypt (Baramouda 6 : Lives of Saints : Synaxarium) and the power to change and triumph over sin with the Lord: She lived a sinful life for many years until the mercy of God touched her life, she met people going to Jerusalem, and she went with them. She asked the pure



Virgin Mary to intercede on her behalf for the salvation of her soul. She then lived in the wilderness for forty-seven years. She strove strenuously for seventeen years; Satan fought against her by the fornication she repented from. She overcame it with the grace of God.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 8.5: How Can the Bible Help Me?

Building Block 8: The Bible and You: Discerning Practical Answers



Objective

To understand the significance of the Holy Bible in our life.

Application

Make a plan to read the Bible (and have someone to hold you accountable, like your parents or FoC). For the upcoming liturgies, come early and try to listen (and comprehend) the readings and the sermon.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Psalm 69](#); [Psalm 83](#); [Psalm 107](#); [Psalm 109](#); [John 3:1-8](#); [2 Timothy 3:14-17](#) [Psalm 119:105, 28, 133](#);



Liturgy: [Introduction to Midnight Prayers](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom](#); [St. Cyril of Alexandria](#); [St. John Chrysostom on John](#)



Story: [St. Anthony the Great](#), [St. Abanoub](#)



Other: [Fr. Anthony Mourad](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ The Holy Bible: Overview

Consider having this discussion: We've all been told a thousand times in Church and Sunday School: Say your Prayers, Read your Bible... but have you ever grappled with trying to read scripture consistently? Do you struggle to understand what you read? Or do you know why you should read the Bible regularly?

- The Bible tells us: who God is and what He has done for us; what it means to truly be a human being and what the purpose of our life is; and how each of us should respond – with our whole life – to what God has done for us in His love. The Bible contains the answers to the most fundamental questions that we as human beings can ask.
- The Bible is a guide and a tool; the Bible is our protection and is also our source for New Life in Christ Jesus. It was written so people will believe Jesus is the Christ, John 20:31 and it is the source of wisdom

+ The Holy Bible as a Guide

- The Bible shows us God's character and provides us God's revelation of Himself to His people. In each section of the Bible, we see God's holy, unchanging, faithful, gracious, and loving character.
- Psalm 119:105, 133: The Word of God serves as light in this dark world and keeps us from sin.
- Proverbs 16:9: Although man is absorbed in his earthly plans, the Lord guides us in the heavenly manner through his Word.
- Ephesians 4:14-16: Through the Bible, we the believers grow in maturity and become firm in the faith.
- "Knowledge of the Bible protects us and ignorance of it results in a multitude of evils. "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures. We go into battle without arms, and how are we to come off safe?" (St. John Chrysostom Homily IX On Colossians)

+ The Holy Bible as Protection

- Psalm 119:28, 69, 83, 107, 109, 161: The Word mentions all bad experiences and shows us the ways to recover with the Lord.
- Ephesians 6:10-17, Hebrews 4:12: The Word of God is part of the Armor of God, and It is powerful, always on the offensive, and protecting us daily.
- "Arise, O You Children of the Light" (Midnight Prayers/Introduction to Midnight Psalmody): "Let my cry come before You, O Lord. Give me understanding according to Your word. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / Let my supplication come before You, deliver me according to Your word. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / My lips shall utter praise, for You teach me your statutes. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / My tongue shall speak of Your words, for all Your commandments are righteousness. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / Let Your hand

become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / I longed for Your salvation, O Lord, and Your Law is my delight. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / Let my soul live and it shall praise You, and let Your judgments help me. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind. / I have gone astray, like a lost sheep, seek Your servant for I do not forget Your commandments. Glory be to You, O Lover of Mankind." Those who keep His word live His in protection. They are guarded from straying and harsh judgment and gain understanding, answering of their supplications, help, and salvation.

+ The Holy Bible as a Tool

- 2 Timothy 3:14-17: The Bible serves us doctrine and discipline, equipping us to perform every good work and providing us a source of Christian integrity.
- Matthew 4:1-11: Just as Christ used the Word of God to counter Satan, we too must resist sin using true understanding of the Bible.
- We learn from the life of St. Anthony the effect and work of the Holy Word of God on him. As we read; "Once, he entered the church and heard the words of the Lord Christ in the Gospel, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Matthew 19:21. He returned to his house, decided to fulfill this commandment and considered it directed to him personally. He gave his wealth to the poor and needy, and he took his sister and placed her with some virgins.
- Similarly St. Abanoub, "At age twelve Abanoub entered the church to hear the priest asking the congregation to remain faithful during the persecutions provoked by Diocletian, the Roman emperor. Abanoub received the Holy Sacraments, then he prayed to God to guide him to where he can confess his faith in Jesus our Lord. After that Abanoub went out, and gave all his possessions to the needy. Then he set off to a city called Samanoud, on foot. While he was walking, he saw the Archangel Michael in celestial glory. The sight was so extraordinary that Abanoub fell to the ground, but the Archangel raised him up, and told him that he must suffer for three days in Samanoud and he would witness to Jesus Christ in other places also.
- Meditating and tending honestly to the littlest of things in the Bible gains one many blessings.
- Regularly reading God's word reorients our thinking so that we can grow in maturity, which is part of the Christian calling (Ephesians 4:14-16; Romans 12:1-2). Have you ever met a mature Christian who did not regularly read the Bible?

+ The Holy Bible as our sanctification the Source of New Life

- Scripture reading sanctifies us. "Moreover, if the Devil does not dare to enter into the house where the Gospel lies, much less will he ever seize upon the soul which contains such thoughts as these, and no evil spirit will approach it, nor will the nature of sin come near. Well, then, sanctify your soul, sanctify your body by having these thoughts always in your heart and on your tongue. For if foul language is defiling and evokes evil spirits, it is evident that spiritual reading sanctifies the reader and attracts the grace of the Spirit." (St. John Chrysostom Homily 32 On John)
- The Bible helps us to obtain our salvation. "Now if we are willing to examine the Scriptures in this way, carefully and systematically, we shall be able to obtain our salvation. If we unceasingly are preoccupied with them, we shall learn both correctness of doctrine and an upright way of life. (St. John Chrysostom Homily 53 On John)
- John 3:1-8: The Bible enlightens us, the earthly, to the heavenly and the ways of salvation and gives us rebirth. "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Nicodemus is convicted hereby of being still carnal, and therefore no way receiving the things of the Spirit of God. For he thinketh that this so dread and illustrious Mystery is foolishness. And hearing of the birth spiritual and from above, he imagineth the carnal womb returning to birth-pang of things already born, and, not attaining beyond the law of our nature, measured things Divine; and finding the height of its doctrines unattainable by his own conceptions, he falleth down, and is carried off." - St. Cyril of Alexandra.
- John 5:24; 20:31: Through belief of these writings, we learn of Christ and we gain salvation through His name.
- John 11:43: Lazarus raised from the dead after 4 days hearing the word of the Lord saying "Lazarus, come forth!" Likewise, we too should listen to the commands of the Lord and read the Bible so that the Lord can lift away our deadness and embrace us with His love.



Building Block 9: Discerning God's desires

Theme: Christian Discernment

Building Block 9: Discerning God's desires



Lesson 9.1: God Is Calling Everyone

Objective

God is calling and inviting everyone, He has no partiality.

Application

Mimic this love and strive to show no partiality to others.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Galatians 3:26-29](#), [Isaiah 25:6-9](#), [1 Timothy 2:4](#), [Luke 12:32](#), [Luke 14:15-24](#), [Matthew 23:13-39](#), [Revelation 19:7-9](#)



Liturgy: [\(Agpeya\) Conclusion of Every Hour](#)



Patristics: [St. Ambrose of Milan](#)



Story: [The Parable of the Great Supper](#)



Other: [What is our excuse? Fr. Youhanna Yanny](#)

➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

+ God Has No Partiality

- God doesn't make a distinction between male and female or judge based on race, but we are all one in Christ. As we are reminded by St. Paul: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Galatians 3:26-29
- He comes to bring salvation to all. He frees us from death and gives us feast with Him (Isaiah 25:6-9)
- God seeks everyone, without exception: Jesus Christ calls all to be saved and works with all who give effort: "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:4 and "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Luke 12:32
- Which in turn inspires us to pray in the Conclusion of Every Hour ("Who does not wish the death of the sinner but rather that he returns and lives, who calls all to salvation for the promise of the blessings to come.")
- Just as Jesus Christ calls ALL of us to be saved, we too must treat everyone we meet or come across as equal to ourselves since we are all part of one body in Jesus Christ.
- And so the Lord Jesus came that he might save what was lost; He came, indeed, to take away the sin of the world to heal our wounds. But not all desire the remedy, and many avoid it ... He heals those that are willing and does not compel the unwilling." - St. Ambrose of Milan

+ The Parable of the Great Banquet: The Master's Original Invitation

- "Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'" Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "" Luke 14:15-24
- The Master invites many to His banquet and He invites them to taste the greatness of His supper but all of them made excuses and found reasons not to attend. The people who were invited begin to make excuses and decline to come to His supper. These people begin to put other



things ahead of coming to this great banquet.

- We often do the same and make excuses not to pray or go to church or not fast and spend time with Christ. He is always calling us to partake with Him and partake in His greatness but the worldly desires and distractions take us away from Him.
- This parable teaches us that the more earthly things we have, whether it be materialistic or not, the less time we have for Christ.
- The Lord invites outcasts and sojourners to His banquet instead. The poor in the parable who had time to attend the banquet represent those who do not let the earthly distractions keep them away from Christ.

+ Excuses we make

How does one discern the difference between directives of the Scribes and Pharisees in comparison to general directives another (a servants, a parents, a priest, etc...) may give you? [One is rooted in your benefit, the other is rooted in selfishness and appearance. It is not that the directives in and of themselves were incorrect, they were simply missing the point of them and not using these as tools of spiritual growth.]

- Matthew 23:13-39: This chapter Jesus Christ talks about the scribes and the Pharisees and how they pay attention to what is on the outside and not what is important on the inside.
- Israel, the chosen of the Lord, strays and begins to put hierarchy and vanity over true worship. Christ is clearly showing and telling us what to do and what not to do. He is making it clear what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to act. So that when we are invited to the banquet and we are to partake with Him, we are true inside and out.
- Jesus Christ is not only giving us warnings and telling us how to not act, but He is giving us the answer of how to be and how we can truly be Christ like so that we can truly benefit and partake with Him.
- “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.” Matthew 23:15-16
 - Here Jesus Christ gives an example of how we sometimes may act. We might be “clean” and show that we are doing and acting the right way by going to Church and acting like a good Christian when what is inside of us is not truly Christian like at all. We are to clean inside out.

+ The New Invitation

- “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ ” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.” Revelation 19:7-9
 - These people (that is, all of us) were able to receive the blessing of His supper and gain its benefits.
- Just as it is mentioned in Luke 14:21-24 “So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’ ”
 - Likewise, the Lord has extended the blessing and salvation to the gentiles.
 - Jesus Christ is also extending the blessing to us each and every day. He is always knocking at the door and waiting for us to open it and let Him in.
- All He wants for us is to be in communion with Him and to have a relationship with him that will lead us to eternal salvation.
- We are invited every single day to be with Jesus Christ and we have to make time for Him. We can easily be consumed by school work, family stuff, activities, sports, hanging out with friends that by the end of our day, we have no time for Christ. Our time and relationship with Christ is and should always be our priority.
- Just as Christ is always inviting us to be with Him, we need to invite Him in everything we do. He needs to be a part of our school work, when we hang out with our friends, when we are eating, etc.
- We also need to invite others to know Christ as well. We need to evangelize and bring others to Christ and show them His love through us. When we act Christ like and show His love, we are bringing others to get to know His salvation for humankind. We should not be judging or choosing who is worthy but invite all. These could be your friends at school or teammates or people you meet when volunteering. We have an obligation and duty to invite all to know Christ as He has invited us.

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 9.2: Repentance—A Permanent Change of Direction, David

Building Block 9:
Discerning God's
desires



Objective

Obtain a good understanding of the word repentance and the role of confession as we read in David's story

Application

Make an effort to visit your Father of Confession regularly and seek to honestly turn from the path of sinning

References and Resources



Scripture: [Matthew 4:17, 18:9, 27:3-5, 26:69-75](#), [John 21:15-19](#), [Proverbs 24:16, 28:13](#), [Psalm 38:3-8, 38:18; 2 Corinthians 7:10, 2 Samuel 2:13, 12:13](#); [Mark 1:5, 11:26](#); [1 John 1:9](#); [James 5:16](#), [Genesis 50:17](#); [Luke 17:3, 19:8](#); [Isaiah 43:18-19](#); [Luke 9:62](#); [Philippians 3:13](#); [Micah 7:19](#), [Psalm 50](#)



Liturgy: [\(Agpeya\) Psalm 51](#)



Patristics: [St. Moses the Strong](#), [St. Isaac the Syrian](#), [St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [Story of King David](#)



Other: [Life or Purity and Repentance - Pope Shenouda](#), [Obstacles to Repentance and Being with David in his Repentance - Father Athanasius Farag](#), [The Sins of Men and the Sins of Women - Bishop Youssef](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What is Repentance?

- Repentance is a sincere remorse of one's own actions, accompanied by absolution through confession.
- This regret should not turn to pity and depression (as it did for Judas Iscariot; Matthew 27:3-5), but rather a motive to turn back to God and be relieved (like Peter; Matthew 26:69-75; John 21:15-19)
- One should commit to earnest change from the past wrongs, avoid pathways that encourage sin, and not see this as a "get out of jail free" card for sin; conversely, repeated sins shouldn't be a cause of worry, given honest repentance (Proverbs 24:16).

+ David's Sin

- The Holy Scripture details David's thoughts and intentions and how he connived a dubious plan in order to pursue Bathsheba, with whom he lusted to have an intimate relationship, although he knew that she was a married woman (2 Samuel II).
- In addition, her husband was not a stranger to David, but a fervent and loyal enlisted member of David's own army. Thus, betrayal was another compiled sin. David entered a state of sinning and became numb, he was lost and lived in darkness.
- 2 Samuel II: David sends Uriah to die on the front lines so that he could take Uriah's wife, Bathsheba.
- Two major pitfalls led to this sin:
 - I. Comfort in Life:
 - At this point of his life, Saul was dead, David was no longer on the run, he was king, and enjoying great comfort and peace in his kingdom. He had no troubles or hardships whatsoever. He was in charge, no anxiety or worry was in his life. He was leading a life of total prosperity and comfort in his life for the past 7 years since Saul's death.
 - It is precisely in these times that we have to watch out. When we live an anxiety-free life, our dependence and need for God decreases slowly and our relationship with God becomes gradually weaker without us noticing it.
 - Our relationship with God gradually becomes cold when we do not depend and feel we have no need for God. This feeling is gradual and sneaks up on us in a deceptive way. We don't see it coming.
 - It is a deceptively slow coldness and lack of desire for God. Our faith gradually decreases and God becomes less and less

important in our daily life. This is exactly what happened to him.

- In his 7 years of prosperity as king, his relationship with God gradually became weaker and cold, his faith and zeal decreased, and the need for God in his life was dwindling.
- 2. Laziness and Boredom: One of the real vices and traps that comfort brings in is laziness and boredom.
 - We tend to become lazy and bored when things are going well. When we are in this state of Laziness and boredom, sin lies at the door.
 - Being lazy and bored is the best condition for the devil to attack because he knows that when we are in this state, we can fall into great sins. David was precisely in this state.
 - We read "It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings went out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 12:1).
 - David should have been going out to battle as he normally would do, but he decided to stay home and do nothing. This laziness of David led to boredom.
 - As he had nothing to do at home, he wandered on his rooftop out of boredom, and that's when he saw Bathsheba bathing and sin then immediately entered his head because he was already spiritually weak. Laziness leads to boredom, and boredom leads to great sins.

+ Out of darkness

- Living in darkness means being far from God. We don't listen to our conscience instead we block out all that is good and could make sense.
- David lived in darkness, but because God does not want to see the death of a sinner (conclusion of every hour), but to repent and live, He sent David the Prophet Nathan who incited him to confession.
- God has given us a father of confession to listen and guide us and help us return back to the Lord.
- David automatically woke up from the Spiritual blindness he was living and he was very harsh on himself:
 - "There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, Nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness. I am [a]troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are full of inflammation, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart." (Psalm 38:3-8)

+ David's Repentance

- David did indeed sin, but he did the most important thing afterwards. He repented wholeheartedly in sincerity and without any excuses or lies.
- We all sin, but the most important aspect of our character is how we deal with that sin. The road to spiritual perfection is repentance. The church fathers say that the biggest difference between a saint and the sinner is NOT the number of sins they commit, but rather their repentance and taking their spiritual life seriously.
- 2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 50: David confessed and repented immediately when he was confronted with his sin, without excuse.
- There are 6 main steps of repentance highlighted by this story:
 - 1. Feel Godly Sorrow for Our Sins:
 - The first step of repentance is to recognize that you've committed a sin against God's commandments. Feel true sorrow for what you've done and for disobeying our Heavenly Father.
 - Feel sorrow for any pain you may have caused toward other people. "For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin" (Psalm 38:18). (Other Verses: Psalm 38:18; Matthew 4:17; 2 Corinthians 7:10)
 - Even with a dead child, he feels sorrow for his sins and supplicates to God without anger.
 - "King David loved his child and sat indeed in sackcloth and ashes, but he neither brought soothsayers nor enchanters although there were such then, as Saul shows, but he made supplication to God." - St. John Chrysostom
 - 2. Confess Our Sins: Confession involves three steps.
 - We first confess our sins to ourselves, admitting to ourselves that we have done something wrong, then we repent before God, then we confess our sins to God before our Father of confession and receive absolution from him. (2 Samuel 2:13; Other Verses: Mark 1:5; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16)
 - 3. Ask for Forgiveness:
 - Pray to God for His forgiveness. Forgive others who have hurt you. Forgive yourself and know that God loves you, even though you've sinned.



- We say in the Lord's prayer: forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. We must also learn to forgive others (Genesis 50:17; Mark 11:26; Luke 17:3)
- 4. Accept Responsibility and Correct the Problems Caused by the Sin:
 - Make sure to fix any problems caused by your sin. Do whatever you can to fix things caused by your sin. (Luke 19:8)
- 5. Forsake Sin:
 - We are to run away from and do whatever we can to stop sinning. Make a promise to yourself and to God that you will never repeat the sin.
 - Recommit yourself to obeying God's commandments and continue to repent if you sin again. (Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 18:9)
- 6. Receive Forgiveness:
 - The Lord will forgive us when we truly repent with a sincere heart. Allow His forgiveness and peace to come upon us. When we feel at peace with ourselves, we can know we are forgiven.
 - We must not hold onto our sins and the sorrow we felt. We must let it go by truly forgiving ourselves, just as the Lord has forgiven us. (Isaiah 43:18-19; Luke 9:62; Philippians 3:13; Micah 7:19)
- "This life has been given to you for repentance. Do not waste it on other things." St. Isaac the Syrian

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 9.3: The Value of Time

Building Block 9:
Discerning God's
desires



Objective

To understand the meaning and value of time and the need to use it wisely.

Application

So....When....Where...How...and for How long do you want to meet with the Lord??

These are all questions you need to answer for yourself and act on it today. Because today is the only thing you own and tomorrow is not yours yet, so make sure you dedicate a daily time to enjoy the presence and companionship of The Lord Jesus through prayer, bible reading, praising...etc.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Ephesians 5:16](#), [Ephesians 5:15-20](#), [Ecclesiastes 12:1](#), [Proverbs 19:15](#), [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#), [Malachi 3:7-10](#), [John 4:34-36](#)



Liturgy: [The Liturgy of St. Cyril](#)



Patristics: [Abba Isidore](#)



Story: [The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins](#)



Other: [Legacy Curriculum Grade 9 \(Pg 145-147\)](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Why in your opinion is time limited and is of great essence?
 - Time is the best expression of equality between all humans since we all get the same share of time.
 - All humans get 24 hours per day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year.
 - Humans can vary in the amount of fortune, intelligence, happiness, beauty or even health but they are all equal in the amount of time they get.
 - We also cannot save time; rather we can do more for the same time. St. Paul says “Redeeming the time because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:16)
 - Whose time is it? C. S. Lewis makes a profound point about time. He says that we usually regard time as our own. We start our day with the curious assumption that we are the lawful possessors of an upcoming twenty-four hours. With that hazardous assumption we then plot a matrix for our day, filling in time slots with tasks or restful moments. We might hope that we are managing our time in a way that will somehow please God. But when we begin with the assumption that time is ours, inconveniences and unexpected interruptions become intrusions into “my time.”
 - By contrast, we can begin with the assertion that time is not our own. Time belongs to the Lord and He has a plan for time that He desires us to accept for our own peace and joy.
- + Ask the students how they spend their day? And how many hours do they allocate for each activity?
 - Time is a gift from God, but it is up to us to open that gift and use it, abuse it or even unuse it.
 - In this age of social media and cell phones, there are too many things competing for our attention, Tiktok, Snapchat, youtube to name a few, on average, global internet users spend 2 hours and 27 minutes on social media per day, there are good use of these tools like learning hymns or learning how to build a gaming laptop.
 - In the Liturgy of St. Cyril, we pray: ” We ask You, O our Lord, grant us Your servants, throughout our lifetime on earth, and more especially at present, thoughts that do not recall to memory former evil deeds and a conscience without hypocrisy-, but grant us faithful thoughts and a heart full of brotherly love” -The Liturgy of St. Cyril
 - Or you may choose to passively watch unimportant stuff for many hours or you may choose to watch or say inappropriate stuff; your choice affects your future on earth as well as eternally, so make sure you choose carefully.
 - We all need to learn how to manage our time wisely and make the best of every minute in our life because every minute counts.
 - Someone who is organized can control their time instead of time controlling them.
 - The importance of dedicating time to God daily and to realize that our life on earth is but for a short time and will end soon, we need to prepare for the afterlife. “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say,

I have no pleasure in them”- Ecclesiastes 12:1

- "When I was younger and remained in my cell I set no limit to prayer; the night was for me as much the time of prayer as the day." Abba Isidore; "For now is the time to labor for the Lord, for salvation is found in the day of affliction" Abba Isidore

+ So, how can we manage our time?

You may use the story of the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins to illustrate the following points

1. Specify your goals according to God's will.

- Everyone needs to specify daily, weekly, monthly, yearly and even life long goals. Otherwise the days pass by aimlessly and wastefully. "Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, And an idle person will suffer hunger." - Proverbs 19:15.
- When specifying goals in our life we need to consult with God to show us His will in our life and the goals He has for us (Ephesians 5:15-20).
- Thus, we clearly need to spend time with God every day to consult with Him regarding our goals. We also ask Him to bless our time and our productivity. Above all, we need that time to enjoy his companionship and love.

2. Specify the time to meet your goals.

- We have to put a schedule for ourselves to meet our goals. King Solomon says that to everything under the sun there is a time (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).
- The most important thing is to be realistic in your time schedules so that you do not get discouraged when you do not meet the schedule.
- But it is better to put a time frame for your daily activities-even if you could not meet them- than having no time limits or time frame at all.
- When specifying time for each of your daily activities, we have to remember that God has asked us to give the Tithes from everything to get His blessing (Malachi 3:7-10).
- If we calculate the tithes of our day (24 hours), it comes to almost 2.5 hours. So, are we giving God the tithes from our time??

3. Prioritize your goals according to God's will.

- We also need to prioritize our daily tasks and activities. It is common that we do all our daily tasks and activities but at the end of the day we are very tired to pray or to read the Bible.
- Although the retreat time and the time out with God should have a priority in our daily schedule, we usually run out of time when it comes to God.
- A spiritual person would know to give the best of his time to God and know that he needs God not that God needs him. Thus, God becomes a priority in his daily schedule.

4. Make sure you meet your goals.

- There is nothing as satisfying as the feeling that you achieved your goals and completed your tasks for the day, the week or the month.
- So always keep focused on the goal until you achieve it. Do not get distracted and lose the time because you cannot retrieve the lost time.
- Make sure you do not look for excuses not to complete your tasks, rather work hard to fulfill them.
- The Lord said, "Do you not say there are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold I say to you lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest..." (John 4:34-36)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 9.4: Growing in God's Grace and Knowledge

Building Block 9:
Discerning God's
desires



Objective

To understand our role in growing in God's grace and His knowledge.

Application

Always remember when praying to give thanks to God for his Grace in your life.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Romans 3:24-26](#), [1 Timothy 2:4](#), [Ezekiel 16: 4-14](#),
[Matthew 7:7](#), [James 4:6](#), [1 Peter 5:5](#), [Galatians 1:13-15](#), [2 Samuel 12:13](#).



Liturgy: [Prayer of Thanksgiving - Liturgy - St. Basil](#)



Patristics: [St. Silouan the Athonite](#)



Story: [Story of St. Moses](#), [King David](#), [St. Paul](#); [Aquila and Priscilla](#)



Other: [The Divine Transforming Grace](#), [LAcopts Article](#), [C.S. Lewis - Christian Reflections](#)

➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

+ What is Divine Grace?

Consider asking: What exactly is knowledge of Christ? How should we interpret the phrase "to know Christ?" What does God want for you after you have been baptized, forgiven and received His Holy Spirit? [God calls on us to change, grow and overcome to become more like Him throughout our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can have Christ formed in us.]

- It is help sent by God as a free gift (one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit) to sustain a human being in order to support that person's weak will that often deviates and experiences constant needs.
- Everything that God gives to us is the work of divine grace.
- Divine Grace means God's love which sinful man is not worthy to receive from Him but God's compassion and goodness are so great that God offers His Grace of His own will and authority without man having to ask for it.
- There are aspects of grace that are visible and obvious and others that are not so obvious.
- The most visible or obvious evidence of grace is the kind we consciously see, or feel in our lives; we feel God's hand supporting and guiding us.
- The invisible work of grace is that which sustains us without our knowledge and keeps evil away from us before we are even aware it has approached us.
- Grace can work internally or externally, in our surroundings and works in order to oppose the powers that work against us.
- There is grace that seeks our spiritual growth by leading us to repentance or raising us up to a higher spiritual level, approaching divine love.
- There is also grace that brings about miracles and powerful action in our life.

+ Our need for Divine Grace

- Human beings need divine grace to sustain us despite our human weakness and renew our fallen nature.
- Because humanity continues to fall into sin, this is why we need God's grace. So that we can be justified and live in holiness and righteousness. St. Paul said "They are now justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith. God did this to show righteousness, because in divine forbearance God had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that the Lord God is righteous and justifies the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:24-26).
- By the grace of God and the action of the Holy Spirit, our hearts become inflamed with God's love, and the heart that loves God is a pure heart, it loves goodness and keeps away from sin.

- We look up to our Lord Jesus Christ to change us internally by His grace and to transform the world by this same grace.
- We therefore pray, "God, in Your grace, transform the world at the right time, and grant us the hope for a better future for the Church and all of humanity."
- "Don't be troubled if you don't feel the love of God in yourself, but think about the Lord, that He is merciful, and guard yourself from sins, and the grace of God will teach you." (St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.16)
- Thus, through our need of Divine grace we conclude the majority of our prayers, such as the thanksgiving prayer, with "through the grace, compassion and love..." since it is through the grace of God that we are able to lift up our prayers to Him.

+ The work of Divine Grace

- In our daily life, divine grace protects us from temptations and difficulties, prevents us from falling in sin, and guards us from the conspiracies of Satan and evil people.
- Divine grace protects us and grants us peace and tranquility.
- In our spiritual life, divine grace keeps a person from falling in sin, for truly sin is powerful.
- We see how divine grace protected Daniel in the lions' den and the three youths in the fiery furnace. It also protected David when he faced Goliath.
- Divine grace calls us to salvation for God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4).

+ But how does divine grace come upon a person?

- Grace seeks us where we're at and brings us to the King's presence: God's grace initiates the relationship. He does not wait around for us to come to Him. In fact, we cannot and do not come to God in and of ourselves. God seeks us out and finds us where we're at. (Ezekiel 16: 4-14)
- "I never had the experience of looking for God. It was the other way round: He was the hunter (or so it seemed to me) and I was the deer. He stalked me ... took unerring aim, and fired. And I am very thankful that this is how the first (conscious) meeting occurred." (C.S. Lewis - Christian Reflections, p. 169)
- Grace comes by means of prayer, as our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." (Matthew 7:7).
- Also, grace comes to the humble person, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5)
- "Grace does not act by itself. If a person takes action, then it will work with him and sustain, strengthen, and guide him all the way." HH Pope Shenouda III; " Grace works in every one, but the elect ones became chosen, because they accepted grace to work with them and cooperated with its action. They did not resist God's will, but submitted their will completely to the work of grace." HH Pope Shenouda III

+ Examples of Divine grace in the lives of saints:

- St. Paul: God's Grace changing Saul from persecuting the church to Paul the apostle and great preacher. - Galatians 1:13-15
- King David: The grace of God bringing a fallen king to repentance and restoration to a right relationship with Him. - 2 Samuel 12:13
- St. Moses the Strong (black): A Violent Man Gentled by Grace. God's Grace changes a murderer and thief to repent and become a great Saint. - Story of St. Moses.
- The story of Aquila and Priscilla helps us understand some of the ways God helps us to grow in our Christian walk. We read in Acts 18:24-26 how they helped another believer to grow, "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."
- This caring and zealous couple were truly trying to help and encourage another believer to grow. Their own faithful study had prepared them to humbly teach and help others.
- What was the result? "By the words of Aquila and Priscilla he was more fully instructed. The result was that when Apollos traveled on to Greece, he "greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ." (Acts 18:27-28)



Theme: Christian Discernment

Lesson 9.5: Eternal Life as God's Sons and Daughters

Building Block 9:
Discerning God's
desires



Objective

Understand who we are and how we became His sons and daughters.

Application

Take time each day to remind yourself of your true identity: you are a beloved child of God because He has chosen to love you. You may want to write it in your journal or put it on a note card where you can see it.

References and Resources



Scripture: [1 Peter 2:9](#), [1 John 3:1-2](#), [Genesis 1:27](#), [Galatians 3:27-28](#), [John 1:12](#), [1 John 3:1](#), [Romans 8:23](#), [John 17:12](#), [Luke 15:11-22](#), [John 17:3](#), [Romans 8:15](#), [Romans 8:16](#), [Matthew 21:43](#), [Romans 8:17](#)



Liturgy: [The liturgy of St. Gregory/Prayer of Reconciliation to the Son](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#), [St. Augustine's second homily on the Gospel of John](#)



Story: [The Red Sea Crossing](#), [The Parable of the Lost Son](#)



Other: [Children Of God Through The Holy Spirit](#), [Fr. Athanasius Kaldas: Divinity of Christ](#) by H.H. Pope Shenouda III; [The Kingdom of Heaven](#), [Fr. Luke Sidarous](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

+ Who Are You?

Consider discussing: Is it possible that God created someone, he/she was His creature, but not His child? Can one be certain that he/she is a true child of God?

- "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)
- "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:1-2)
- St. Augustine's second homily on the Gospel of John says, "What did he bestow on them? Great kindness; great mercy. Singly born, he did not wish to remain one and only. Many couples who have had no children adopt some when advanced in years and realize by choice what nature was unable to provide; that is what human beings do. But someone who has an only son rejoices in him all the more, because he alone will take possession of the whole inheritance and not have anyone else to divide it with and thus turn out the poorer. Not so God; he sent the very same one and only Son he had begotten, through whom he had created everything, into this world so that he should not be alone but should have adopted brothers and sisters. You see, we were not born of God in the same way as the only-begotten Son of his, but we were adopted through the Son's grace. For the only-begotten Son came to forgive sins, those sins which had us so tied up that they were an impediment to his adopting us; he forgave those he wished to make his brothers and sisters and made them co-heirs... No, he was not afraid of having co-heirs, because his inheritance is not whittled down if many possess it. They themselves, in fact, become the inheritance which he possesses, and he in turn becomes their inheritance."

+ How did we become God's Sons and Daughters?

- It all starts in the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible where God created man. "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27)



- As we pray the reconciliation to the Son of St. Gregory Liturgy, "who for the sake of goodness only brought man into existence out of nonexistence, and put him in the Paradise of joy."
- We are born into this world and shortly after our birth, we "die" and receive the Holy Spirit through Baptism (Death) and Chrismation (Holy Spirit)
- According to our faith, our Baptism is our death, burial, and resurrection becoming in union with the Lord Jesus Christ. "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28). It is a Mystery, necessary for our salvation, given to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
- The Egyptians couldn't follow the Israelites to the other shore of the red sea, St. Augustine wrote, "Your sins are your enemies. They will follow you, but only up to the Red Sea. When you have entered (the Red Sea through baptism), you will escape: they (your sins) will be destroyed, just as the Egyptians were engulfed by the waters while the Israelites escaped on dry land." Thus baptism is an exodus, a passage through the Red Sea of sin and death to the glorious freedom of the children of God."
- We read in the book "Divinity of Christ" by H.H. Pope Shenouda III that the sonship of human beings to God is either through faith, or love, or adoption.
- Through faith: the Holy Bible says about Christ, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). The phrase 'children of God' here means the believers.
- Through love: St. John says in his first Epistle: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1) Therefore, it is an act of love from God to call us His children.
- Through adoption: It is written in the Epistle to the Romans: "But we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23). It is known that whoever is called son and is not a real son, is a son by adoption or son in a spiritual sense.
- We have to walk worthy of His calling and be light and salt and not be called sons of of perdition as Christ described Judas for his betrayal, (John 17:12)
- Our goal is to keep our minds and hearts focused on Jesus Christ. Don't act like the prodigal son, lest you starve yourself, but rather stay in your Father's house, wear the best robe, and eat the fattened calf. - Luke 15: 11-22
- "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3).
- To walk in God's will, Jesus Christ must always be the central focus in our lives.

+ What does God have in store for His sons and daughters?

- We gain security and authorship, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption." (Romans 8:15a)
- We gain intimacy, "by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" (Romans 8:15b)
- We gain assurance, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," (Romans 8:16)
- We are given the unfathomable privilege of becoming His sons and daughters, therefore, we become citizens of eternal life.
- Each of us has a kingdom inheritance. We are heirs of God. and we have a powerful inheritance.
- The Kingdom and its power will be taken away from those who fail to remain faithful to Christ by rejecting His righteous ways. It will be given instead to a people who separate themselves from the world and seek first God's Kingdom and righteousness. (Matthew 21:43)
- Not only are we heirs of God, but we are also co-heirs with Christ. All that has been given to Jesus is made available to us: "and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." (Romans 8:17)

Theme: Christian Discernment

Building Block 9: Discerning God's desires



Lesson 9.6: Open Discussion on the difficulties of finding your purpose

Objective

Understand that God created us with a plan and purpose in mind. Understand that we cannot find our purpose in life away from God.

Application

Perhaps we need to address this question and be honest: Why do we choose things in life other than Christ that will not satisfy us?

We are all created for a purpose and it can be to serve others, be the best parent to your future children, be the best worker in your career, become a philanthropist, become a great artist and use your talents to make people happy, travel the world and volunteer in evangelical missions and bringing people closer to God, etc.

References and Resources



Scripture: [Proverbs 11:14](#), [Judges 6:15](#), [Judges 6:14](#), [Judges 8:28](#), [Judges 6:16](#), [Jeremiah 29:11](#), [2 Corinthians 5:17](#), [Matthew 4:19](#), [Psalm 33:11](#), [Psalm 139:13](#), [Jeremiah 1:4-5](#), [Ephesians 4:22-24](#), [1:11](#), [Colossians 1:16](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy \(St. Basil\)](#).



Patristics: [Cyril of Alexandria](#)



Story: [Gideon](#)



Other: [Our Purpose in life](#), [HG Bishop Youssef](#), [God has a plan for your life](#)



Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Some opening questions you can ask the students and get their opinion or thoughts on the matter:
 - How can I know God's will for my life? Why is God's will so difficult to understand?
 - How do I recognize it? Am I supposed to feel something?
 - It is true that the will of God is sometimes difficult to understand but is that because He doesn't want to reveal it to us?
- + You need to ask yourself, why were you created?
 - God doesn't just create us for no reason or without a purpose or randomly.
 - We were all created for a certain mission or with a certain gift that we are supposed to share with the world and the people we interact with.
 - Your mission or purpose in life is what will give meaning and fulfillment in your life. This will be tied to God's will for your life.
- + So how are we supposed to approach God's will then?
 - We are not supposed to approach God's will but we ought to approach God Himself, there's a big difference.
 - Our primary objective as humans is to enjoy God and that our joy may be full. In the Liturgy of the faithful. "We praise you, we bless you, we serve you, we worship you." (Our purpose here on earth is to praise, bless, serve and worship God. In whatever shape and by what means we do that, is up to our discretion.
 - This happens through fellowship with the Holy Trinity. To know the will of God for us, we need to know God and get closer to God. Only then will it be revealed to us the will of God. "To be called according to God's purpose is to be called according to the will. But is this the will of the one who calls or the will of those who are called? Naturally, every impulse which leads to righteousness comes from God the Father. Christ himself once said: "No one can come to me unless the Father draws him." Nevertheless it is not wrong to say that some are called according to God's purpose and according to their own intentions as well" - Cyril of Alexandria
 - God's plan for us is always something good and never something bad or evil.
- + We can think of God's will for you or your purpose in life as two concentric circles.
 - I. The larger circle is God's general will for you, which includes your sanctification and ultimately your salvation through fellowship with the Persons of the Holy Trinity. We are then truly free when God orders our lives, that is, forms and creates us not as human beings— this he has



already done—but as good people, which he is now doing by his grace, that we may indeed be new creatures in Christ Jesus. Accordingly the prayer: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” (St. Augustine of Hippo)

- 2. Now, once you are inside this outer circle, you can get access to the inner circle which is God’s will for your personal life (meaning choosing my education/career, friends, spouse, etc.).
 - The main problem occurs when someone is trying to access the inner circle but without first getting into the outer one.
 - This is the main cause of frustration one can experience in attempting to know God’s will. But it should not be a cause of frustration, it should be a call to repentance.
 - If you don’t have access to the outer circle, it implies that your fellowship with the Holy Trinity is weak.
 - If you want to know what your Heavenly Father has in store for you, then you first have to acknowledge Him as your Heavenly Father.
 - God wants to reveal His will to us. He is Our Father after all and He has created us to enjoy life in Him.
 - The problem is that often we do not deal with Him as a Father but as a worker that owes us or as a vending machine that we take what we want when we need it.
 - So, to know God’s will for your personal life, you need to step deeper and deeper within the outer circle, deep enough to reach the inner one.
- + There are a few practical tips that could be done to enter the inner circle.
- First, you can hear God’s voice clearly in times of deep prayer. Every now and then, you will find God answering after these deep prayers in different ways that you understand.
 - It is recommended to involve your spiritual father of confession throughout the process as well because, as it says in Proverbs 11:14 “where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” Your spiritual father can also pray with you.
 - However, most of the work needs to be done by you. After all, it is God’s will for you. Why would it be revealed to anyone else? Your spiritual father’s job is to confirm the soundness of your decision.
 - With prayer comes fasting and the power of both of them working together. When we fast and weaken our physical bodies, we strengthen our spiritual life through fasting and prayer.
 - Have hope, faith and belief that the Holy Spirit is working through you and God has a purpose and will for your life here on Earth.
- + Who was Gideon? What makes his story significant?
- A weak and timid man, from the weakest family, and of the smallest tribe in Israel who was chosen by the Lord as a deliverer of his nation. (Judges 6:15).
 - “Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?” (Judges 6:14). Anyone can see themselves very little and incapable of achieving any purpose, but the Lord always has another opinion. God is not a respecter of persons, He can call and use anyone. Gideon was the weakest man from a weak family, yet God chose him and used him to subdue a great enemy with only 300 men. (Judges 8:28).
 - God does not depend on numbers or strength to fight the enemy. He needs faithful people who are ready to be used by Him, even timid believers of little faith, his promise to be with us and supports us at all times. (Judges 6:16).
 - From a young man lacking any confidence, to a might warrior to a judge over Israel, he is known as one of the greatest of the 15 judges. God has a great and prosperous plan for each and every one of us. (Jeremiah 29:11).



ARCHIVE



Version 1 lessons are being redeveloped.

Access to ALL Lessons available in Version 1 found in the archive.
Redeveloped lessons will be delivered every 6 to 8 weeks.

PK-G12: VERSION 1, 2020-2021 – [DRIVE ARCHIVE](#)