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WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

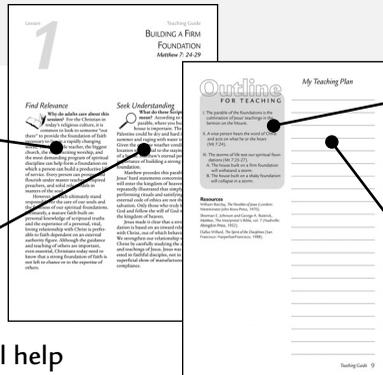
Teacher Helps

Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

My Teaching Plan is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

Teacher Options

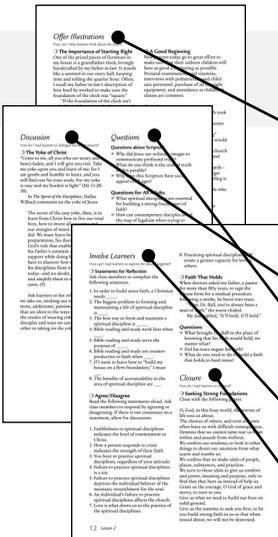
Offer Illustrations presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure gives you a means for wrapping up the session.



You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

REASSURING THE FAITHFUL

Zechariah 12:1-10

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? Surfing through the hundreds of television channels now available to us is bound to bring up at least one or two—and perhaps many more—televangelists. Having just entered the new millennium, some of those evangelists are loudly proclaiming the possible “end of the world” or the “Day of the Lord.” Such predictions are disconcerting to some, frightening to others, and downright ridiculous to many more. Most of us would just rather not think about it, preferring to surf right on over to the *Weather Channel* or *CNN* for a lighter fare.

The sessions of this unit encourage us to explore what the Bible says about such things as the “Day of the Lord” and the “end of the world.” The truth is that many of us know very little about apocalyptic literature in the Bible. It seems too difficult to understand, too hard to comprehend, and largely irrelevant to our lives, so when we come to texts like Zechariah 12 and the other passages in this unit, we shy away from them. But nothing could be further from the truth. Zechariah did not intend to instill fear into the lives of his original audience, but rather, to give them words of assurance in questionable times. These are texts of hope written for people living in difficult days.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? The books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Isaiah (56-66) speak to a unique time in ancient Israel’s history. The generation of people who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem following the Exile were facing trying times. Their enemies were no longer outside the walls of the city, but were inside among the people. Trying to re-establish the organized religion of their past now married to the religion of Judaism in the present was difficult.

Today’s text reveals that the prophet and the “house of David” believed that God was on their side, while they were against the “inhabitants of Jerusalem,” although we have never been able to determine their specific identity. The point is that language surrounding “the day of the LORD” is not about some distant futuristic, cataclysmic battle, but rather is about God’s judgment upon the enemies of the prophet and his followers.

The prophet is not foretelling God’s final battle to end the world, but is actually explaining how God intervenes and truth emerges victorious *every day*. While doing this, the prophet describes for the reader God’s requirements of those who choose also to serve God.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ No One Wins

Have you ever been part of a church or denomination that split? Through the years, many leading denominations have undergone controversies so intense that a “split” in its membership has resulted. Typically, both sides claim to pray to and believe in the same God. Both sides believe in their heart of hearts that they are right. So who decides the winner? Some suggestions: “The majority is not necessarily the winner.” “Truth is always the winner, but whenever there is division, everyone loses.” “While integrity and accuracy regarding the issues that led to the split may be with your side, God never intended anyone to fight over God’s name.” However, as 1 John reveals, internal division over God’s name is not new.

Questions

- What divides people? What divides groups?
- Have you experienced a hurtful division in which people on both sides of the controversy believed they were right? Explain.
- How might the division have been healed?
- What might have resolved the controversy before the tie was completely severed?
- Are some conflicts unresolvable—even for Christians? Explain.

○ Tragic End

February 28, 1993, marks the beginning of a tragic event in US history. The FBI was called to Waco, Texas, to the “Mt. Carmel” compound where David Koresh had led his followers to live while waiting for the second coming of Jesus. They were well-stocked with supplies, including firearms and ammunition. They had heard through Koresh’s sermons that the government would attempt to overtake them. From February 28 until April 19, the “Branch Davidians” (a biblical term) closed themselves inside the compound, awaiting the completion of their teacher’s book on the end times.

Many believe the deaths that occurred on April 19 could have been avoided. They claim that the US government had itchy trigger fingers to end a situation that it did not understand. On that day in April, David Koresh and dozens of others, whether they chose to or not, died.

Questions

- The Branch Davidians are one group among many seeking to pinpoint the end of time. Why do you think some people feel it is so important to predict that moment?
- What comfort does our text from Daniel provide about the end of time?
- Would you live more contentedly if you knew exactly when Christ is going to return? Explain.
- Whether a cultic leader or beloved pastor, why do you think some people are willing to place so much trust in another individual?

Discussion

How can I lead learners to dialogue around the session?

○ The Glad River

An amazing work, Will Campbell's novel *The Glad River* is the story of Doops Momber and his two war-time friends. They call themselves "the neighborhood."

Doops has never been baptized, and much of the novel is about his inner struggle with organized religion. The relationship between Doops and his friends is based on honesty, integrity, trust, and faith—a "community" stronger than any church Doops has experienced. When one of the friends is arrested for murder, the other two members of "the neighborhood" stay by his side through thick and thin.

Glad River encompasses all the themes of Zechariah 12:1-10: community conflict, faith, rejection, hope for a better day. The churches that Doops encounters have their sights on the future, far beyond the here and now. Doops's needs are more immediate. He needs answers now—in the present.

Questions

- Is it possible to experience a community of faith outside the church? Explain.
- When have you felt like an outsider in the church?
- When has the church been oblivious to your needs?
- Should people be held responsible for asking for what they need? Explain.
- How is the church to know of an individual's inner struggles?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- In Zechariah 12:1-10, God's judgment is coming against the sinful. Why and when? Who are the sinful?
- In 12:10 the NRSV says, "When they look on *the one* whom they have pierced...." The Hebrew, on the other hand, reads, "When they look on *me* whom they have pierced...." How does this subtle change alter the meaning of the text?
- What does the "cup" represent? (Confer with Ps 75:8; Isa 11:6; 51:7; Jer 25:5; Mk 14:36.)

Questions for All Adults

- What parts of this passage do you have the most difficulty understanding?
- What images come to mind when you hear the phrase "the Day of the LORD"?
- How do you reconcile God's judgment with God's "compassion" (10)?

Questions for Mature Adults

- In years past, many preachers predicted that the world would never see the 21st century. Considering that their predictions have not proven true, what advice do you have for younger generations regarding those who try to "prophesy"?
- The rift in Judah was serious. What other "rifts" can you recall from biblical stories?

Questions for Younger Adults

- With "your whole life before you," how do you find meaning in a text like this one?
- What symbols of your faith hold the most meaning for you?
- How do you perceive the role of the pastor in modern culture?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How can a child's perspective on living provide hope for *you* during difficult times?
- How can you alleviate your child's potential fears about the end of the world?
- What examples can you use to talk to your children about God's judgment?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ The Relevancy of Apocalyptic Literature

Characteristically, apocalyptic literature is full of symbols. For our culture, these symbols are very difficult to understand, but we, too, make good use of many symbols. Photocopy and enlarge the four symbols found on the Resource Kit pages for this session.

Place these symbols on a wall in your classroom. Then ask the group to list as many other symbols as possible that we use every day. For example, when children squeal in delight at seeing “Golden Arches” from the highway, there is little question as to where they want to eat. Our garments, especially those manufactured in other countries, sport symbols instructing us on how to care properly for the fabric. Not to mention the fact that all our currency is printed with pictures to help us remember their value. In addition, we’ve all learned that a circle with a diagonal line through it means “no.”

When the list is complete, ask your participants how these symbols came to mean what they do. Then remind them that apocalyptic literature uses symbols common to the people of the era in which these books were written. Our job is to learn their symbolic language *before* we begin trying to interpret the text.

Questions

- Why do we use symbolic language rather than just saying what we mean?
- What symbols do we use in church to convey meaning?
- How can we help people outside our faith communities understand our symbols?

○ What Does the Lord Require?

In addition to offering hope during difficult times, apocalyptic literature is also very clear about the demands of a Christian lifestyle. In fact, at times it seems as if this type of literature reflects life as flowing through two streams: the way of God and all *other* ways.

Reread the passage for today (Zech 12:1-10). Ask group members to list some of the demands found in this Scripture. Then ask the following questions.

Questions

- What does the prophet call God’s people to do?
- How can following through on these “demands” help us find the hope God has for us?
- In times of darkness and distress, how can living up to God’s demands provide us assurance?
- If God’s grace is intended as a gift, why does God demand anything of us?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ “DWJD”

Zechariah 12:1-10 is not about the end times, but about living and “doing” in the present. But in today’s fast-food, fast-paced, consumerist society, it is tempting to just let things go as they are. And in the wake of our passivity, churches and denominations split because of poor communication and prideful egos, hunger rips through our land, and the fear of violence gains a powerful grip.

A man once asked Jesus, “What then must I *do* to inherit eternal life?” to which Jesus replied, “You know the commandments.” In other words, “You know what to *do*.” The question we must ask ourselves is, “What would Jesus *do*?” But this is only part of the solution. Anyone can ask. The important part is to *do* what Jesus did.

2

THE BEASTS AND
THE HOLY ONES*Daniel 1:7-28**Find Relevance*

Why do/should adults care about this session? Many people believe and some even preach that Daniel 7 is about the end of the world. Whether we admit it or not, we all have an interest in how the world as we know it might end. Such curiosity fuels the fire—and in some cases, pays the salaries—of those who make such predictions. The temptation to support such intriguing symbols is ever-present; however, we must remind ourselves that these apocalyptic texts are not about end times. Rather, they are about the present time of the original audience. Part of our challenge in teaching is to help others understand how these texts have been misused and how they can be reinterpreted to have meaning for contemporary believers.

Daniel 7:14 is the key text from which the title “Son of Man” is derived. In order to understand how the title fits Jesus, we must start with Daniel’s usage of the term.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? Daniel is a two-part book that came into existence during the Maccabean revolt around 167-164 BC. Chapters 1-6 contain stories about the prophet Daniel, who lived early in the sixth century when Judah went into Exile in Babylon (see 2 Kgs 18-25; Jeremiah). These first six chapters introduce Daniel and his three friends (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego) to the reader through stories called “Court Tales,” which describe how the ancient Israelites were to live in Exile. These accounts deal with matters of faith, diet, service, and endurance during times of persecution.

Chapters 7-12 originated in the second century, when Antiochus Epiphanes IV (a Greek ruler) demanded complete allegiance to the Greek kingdom. He is referred to as the “little horn.” For the Greeks in the second century, the horn represented power. When Antiochus demanded that a statue of Zeus be erected in the Temple and that swine be sacrificed on the Jewish altar (the desolating sacrilege), one family—the Maccabees—rebelled. The ensuing war was horrible, but through God’s miraculous workings, the Jews prevailed. The feast of Hanukkah commemorates this great victory even today. Apocalyptic literature at its best, Daniel 7-12 addresses this very situation.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ **Bloody Mary and the Puritans**

Mary, Queen of Scots, was Queen of England from 1553-1558. Her father, Henry VIII, previously had broken from the Church of Rome and declared England a Protestant country. However, the new queen—known as “Bloody Mary”—decided to convert England back into a Catholic nation, rampantly killing Protestants one after another. In pulpits throughout the country, Puritan preachers rebelled, and despite the threat of death, they proclaimed that Protestants in England were being persecuted—and they were right. People were burned at the stake and even beheaded for living out their faith in God differently than the Queen.

These Puritan preachers found one Scripture text particularly interesting: Daniel 7. To them, the “little horn” signified the Pope, who was using Mary to carry out his wishes regarding statues and sacrifices. But the phrase that brought the most comfort to the people was found in Daniel 7:21-22: according to their interpretation, they were the “holy ones” (rendered “saints” in earlier translations). They truly believed that Daniel 7 was a prophecy surrounding their day and time, and that if they proved faithful to God—despite persecution—they would inherit the Kingdom of God (27).

Questions

- Can these texts from Daniel be interpreted specifically for certain time periods? Explain.
- How do we interpret these texts today?
- In modern history, who might be represented by the “little horn”?

○ **“I Choose to Be Found Doing My Duty”**

In his *Winning the New Civil War*, Robert P. Dugan, Jr., recalls a story about Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. This particular account is a poignant reminder that, rather than fearing what is to come, we are to be faithful until Christ returns:

The time was the 19th of May, 1780. The place was Hartford, Connecticut. The day has gone down in New England history as a terrible foretaste of Judgment Day. For at noon the skies turned from blue to gray and by mid-afternoon had blackened over so densely that, in that religious age, men fell on their knees and begged a final blessing before the end came. The Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. And as some men fell down and others clamored for an immediate adjournment, the Speaker of the House, one Colonel Davenport, came to his feet. He silenced them and said these words: “The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles may be brought.” (183)

Questions

- What “candles” can we provide to light the darkness?
- What is your duty until Christ returns?
- When Christ *does* return, what would you like to be found doing?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Hope and Assurance

The book of Daniel was written to provide hope and assurance for a people undergoing deep suffering. Tell your class the following story:

The citizens of Feldkirch, Austria, didn't know what to do. Napoleon's massive army was preparing to attack. Soldiers had been spotted on the heights above the little town, which was situated on the Austrian border. A council of citizens was hastily summoned to decide whether they should try to defend themselves or display the white flag of surrender. It happened to be Easter Sunday, and the people had gathered in the local church. The pastor rose and said, "Friends, we have been counting on our own strength, and apparently that has failed. As this is the day of our Lord's Resurrection, let us just ring the bells, have our services as usual, and leave the matter in His hands. We know only our weakness, and not the power of God to defend us." The council accepted his plan and the church bells rang. The enemy, hearing the sudden peal, concluded that the Austrian army had arrived during the night to defend the town. Before the service ended, the enemy broke camp and left. ("Salvation," 23 Sept 1999)

Some might argue that the townspeople were merely lucky, that a simple misunderstanding led to their salvation. On the other hand, others would argue that this event shows clear evidence of God's hand of deliverance.

Questions

- How do you understand God's deliverance?
- Has God ever delivered you? Explain.
- In what ways do we need God's deliverance?
- In what ways do we need God's deliverance in this day and time?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- Which four kingdoms are represented by the beasts in Daniel 7?
- To whom does the designation "Son of Man" most likely refer?
- Who is the "little horn"?

Questions for All Adults

- How does this session's interpretation of Daniel 7 affect your understanding of the book of Daniel and "end-time" prophecies?
- What surprises you most in Daniel 7?
- Who are the "holy ones" or "saints"?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What great evangelists have focused their sermons on the second coming of Christ? How have you responded to their preaching?
- When have Christians been persecuted and in need of assurance that God would remain with them?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What significance does this text hold for people who are not persecuted for their faith?
- How does our knowledge of history enhance our understanding of today's text?
- Why is serious, responsible Bible study continually necessary?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you raise your children to anticipate the future but focus on the present?
- When should children be exposed to apocalyptic literature?
- How do you think children perceive the second coming of Christ?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Faithful and True?

Our text from Daniel concludes by saying that those who are “faithful and true” will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Ask your participants to form two small groups. Give each group a copy of the Resource Kit page for this session. Assign one group the word “Faithful,” and the other “True.” Have both groups define their terms under the two headings printed on the page: “Being” and “Doing.” For example, the “Faithful” group will need to list ways that we can both *be* faithful and *do* faithfulness. Help the group understand that the difference lies between faith and works. Some people choose to *be* faithful but never manifest any indication of that choice; in other words, they never act faithfully. Others act faithfully, but never make a conscious choice to follow Christ.

When the groups have finished, ask them to come together and share their findings. Record their responses on the board before asking how they might change if we were living in a time of real persecution. In other words, if dying—or at least suffering—for our faith were a real possibility, would our answers change? Is it easier to be faithful and true in times of religious freedom than in times of persecution?

Depending on the group’s answers, you might push a little harder and ask why faithfulness and being true are so difficult in these days of religious freedom.

○ Faith and Truth in the Bible

Have the group reflect on biblical characters who exhibit both faithfulness and truth in their relationships with God. Note their responses on the board.

When the list is complete, ask the group to elaborate upon their choices. Then ask the following questions.

Questions

- With all their experiences of being faithful and true, were there times when even these heroes faltered in their relationships with God? What happened and how did God respond?
- What can we learn from their experiences about how God might respond to us when we falter—or even fail—to be as faithful as we intend?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ Having Faith

Our lives are very hectic. When we go to church, we expect to hear the truth, and usually we do. But we must remember that blind faith has the potential to be misleading. The Bible can teach us many important lessons, but only if we take time to study it for ourselves. Though we may be busy, we should take time to read and study the Bible for what we can learn both about biblical history and about God. For example, Daniel 7 is not about the second coming of Christ, but it does teach us that having faith in God during times of persecution is the truest test of faith.

End class time by reminding your group of the importance of Bible study. Pray, asking God’s revelation for each person in your group.

FRETTING OVER THE FUTURE

Daniel 12:1-13

Find Relevance



Why do/should adults care about this session? The book of Daniel affirms that dealing with the apocalyptic vision is a relevant and important pursuit for our day and time. What initially seems foreboding actually proves to offer hope. What at first reading might appear to be a prediction of the end of the world is actually a historical account written for people of another era. God is indeed guiding the conclusion of human history, but Daniel does not provide a map for the future. When God chooses, time will cease. And although many have tried, none of us can accurately predict the future. But there is one thing for certain: just as God has been guiding the past, God is also guiding our future. There is no need to expend time and energy worrying about something we cannot control. Our responsibility is to remain faithful.

Another issue in today's session that is relevant for our lives is the promise of resurrection. What *is* resurrection? When does it happen? Most of us have been taught that resurrection awaits us at death. The book of Daniel was the first to offer that idea, but the question for Christians is, how do we lead a life that ends (or begins) in resurrection?

Seeking Understanding



“Michael” is the “son of man” referred to in 7:28. Evidently, once Michael comes with his army and destroys the enemy, truth and hope will win. Historically, the Maccabees championed the cause of the Jews. They are the group that refused to live by the blasphemous curse of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Because of their rebellion, however, many Jews died at the hands of Antiochus. The question that Daniel addresses is, “Did these righteous Jews die for nothing?” The divine response is a resounding “no,” but they would “awake...to everlasting life.” However, only the ones who had faith in God, those who remained loyal to God regardless of how severe the persecution became, would experience resurrection. Others—both unfaithful Jews and, of course, the enemies alike—would wake to “shame and everlasting contempt.”

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Corrected and Amended

Benjamin Franklin did not profess Christianity, but considering his self-penned epitaph, he must have believed in the resurrection of the body:

The Body of B. Franklin,
Printed Like the Cover of an old
Book
Its contents torn out,
And stript of its Lettering and
Guilding, Lies here, Food for
Worms,
But the Work shall not be wholly
lost:
For it will, as he believ'd,
Appear once more
In a new & more perfect Edition,
Corrected and amended by the
Author. ("Resurrection," 24 Sept
1999)

Questions

- Do you believe that resurrection awaits us upon our deaths? Explain.
- What would you tell someone who has lost a loved one about resurrection?
- What does the book of Daniel tell us about resurrection?
- Is resurrection for everyone?

○ The Millerites

In 1818 William Miller, an American farmer and preacher, insisted that there were numerous biblical passages indicating that "in about twenty-five years all the affairs of our present state would be wound up." In fact, Miller was so successful in convincing others that Jesus would return by the year 1843 that he generated the Millerite movement. The participants of this movement were Adventists who eagerly anticipated the "imminent" return of Christ. After waiting in New York—shrouded in white robes—for "the End" to finally come, they were disappointed to find that the moment they waited for never came. Miller then modified his theory, claiming that Christ would return actually sometime between March 21, 1843, and March 21, 1844. Again, he was disappointed, and even upon his deathbed insisted that he must have made some slight error and that people could expect to see the end of the world very soon ("Miller," 12 May 1999).

Questions

- What predictions about the future have you heard people make?
- How do you think others perceived the "Millerites"?
- Before and even since the Millerites, people have tried to pinpoint the date of Christ's return. After so many failed attempts, why do you think people still try?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Keep the Faith

“Keep the Faith” is a slogan urging people to persevere, endure, be faithful. Daniel’s words say all of those things to a people facing serious persecution. Using the angelic figure Michael is the writer’s symbolic way of offering hope for the future. According to our text, when Michael appears, the present age will come to an end and those who have remained faithful will find deliverance. With this imagery, the writer introduces the concept of resurrection: “many...shall awake,” says Daniel. Yet the obvious question for those people in distress is, “How long must we wait” (12:6) (See also Ps 13)? According to the text, the restoration will be established soon—good news for those in despair.

This text is yet another indicator that even in the worst of circumstances, God refuses to turn away from divine promises or the community of faith. In fact, these verses indicate that God is at work even now, offering hope to those who “persevere.”

Questions

- How is your faithfulness challenged daily?
- When life is difficult and God seems far away, what happens to your faithfulness? Explain.
- How can difficult times actually strengthen our faithfulness? But perhaps the first question is, *can* they?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- How did the first readers of the book of Daniel understand resurrection?
- What is Michael’s role in this text?
- What do divine beings and secret books imply?

Questions for All Adults

- What does resurrection mean to you?
- In what area of your life is it most difficult to stay faithful?
- When have you been persecuted for something you believe in?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Do you believe in resurrection?
- What can you tell a younger generation about the value of a long life?
- Some people believe that age in itself is a form of persecution. What is your response to this viewpoint?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What is your understanding of eternal life?
- When have you failed a test of faith?
- How can your failures strengthen your faith?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How will you answer your child’s inevitable question: “Why do people die?”
- How do we encourage children toward receiving eternal life?
- Children endure bullies of all kinds. How can Daniel 12 help a child face the perils associated with growing up?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Faithfulness and Success

In modern America, people often confuse faithfulness with success. Is it possible to be faithful but not successful? Or, more importantly for our context, can we be successful without being faithful?

Divide your participants into two groups, and give each group one half of the Resource Kit page for this session. In light of the statements they have just been given, ask each group to consider whether we can be faithful but not successful, or vice-versa.

(1) God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing. (Martin Luther)

(2) The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

After the groups have had ample time to discuss their statements, come together as a large group to compare responses.

○ What If...?

Hope is central to our lives. It is what often motivates us to be creative and carries us through the most tragic of circumstances. Ask your participants to form groups of three or four, and assign each group to create a list of “hopes” that most people have today. Encourage the groups to be as specific as possible.

Once the groups have completed their lists, call them back together to play “What If...?” Ask, “If God were to help you attain this hope, how would it change your life?” For example, if God helped you earn a million dollars, how would it

change your life? After a few rounds, ask the group questions similar to the following.

Questions

- Are hopes different from wishes? Explain.
- What is the difference between the hopes we have listed and the hope that God offers us?
- What hope does resurrection offer?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ Death and Taxes

An old adage reminds us that only two things are certain in life: death and taxes. The truth is that one (taxes) you must learn to live with, and the other (death) cannot be avoided. Even if you could figure out how to avoid taxes, you can never avoid death. *But* it can be overcome. An enduring faith in God leads to eternal life with God. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving that we need not fear the future, because we have the assurance that we can live with God.

LIVING IN THE
MEANTIME*Matthew 24:1-51**Find Relevance*

Why do/should adults care about this session? Like the previous sessions in this unit, this one also concentrates on the end times. The difference in today's session, however, is that the words and actions come straight from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus warns about "signs" of the "end" and even mentions the coming of "false prophets." More importantly, he offers instruction regarding the Christian agenda to be followed until his return.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? Jesus' response to the disciples' question about the future of the Temple is startling: apparently, it will be destroyed. The disciples continue their interrogation, wanting to know more about the "end of the age." First, Jesus cautions them, "Beware that no one leads you astray." The rest of the chapter builds on this warning. And though the Lord reveals the signs of the end, wars, earthquakes, famines, and the like are present with *every* generation. Therefore, the "end" could be any time. The "desolating sacrilege" (15) refers to the statue of the Roman Emperor that would—and that finally did—rise in the Temple. But Jesus continues to warn the disciples against listening to pretenders and false messiahs.

The fig tree is actually the object lesson for the disciples in this Scripture, for Jesus assures them that just as the fig tree can be trusted to produce fruit at its appointed time, so can the words of Jesus be trusted in the same way. The disciples push him for the *exact* time, but Jesus responds by saying that even he does not know when it will be (36). Verses 37-41 refer to the Romans, who—without rhyme or reason—dragged a number of Christians away to be tortured while leaving others where they stood. Jesus, therefore, urges the disciples to be ready at any time.

How are we to be *always* ready? Jesus encourages us to be ready like faithful slaves (45-51). Though the slave metaphor may not seem ideal for us, it was for them, and in fact, *can be* for us. If we ignore Jesus' commandments and live as if he is never coming back, then his return will be horrible. However, if we live as though our owner may return any moment, we will be found living according to his will. It is important to remember that doing the will of God does not involve wasting one's life away trying to figure out when Jesus will return. Instead, emulate the faithful slave: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, bring release to the captive, and take care of the widow and orphan.

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

The following illustrations are purposely similar in nature. Use the questions at the end of the page to encourage discussion for either.

○ False Messiahs

In the spring of 1993, David Koresh (born “Vernon Howell”) and his “church” locked themselves in a compound outside Waco, Texas. Koresh (Hebrew for “Cyrus,” meaning “the anointed of God” [Isa 45:1]) was a self-proclaimed teacher of the end times. People believed in him and his teachings. He insisted that the world was living among the last days before the return of Christ. The confrontation between the Davidians and the ATF resulted in tragedy. Regardless of one’s opinion concerning the ATF’s actions, David Koresh had misled many people into believing lies about himself and the return of Christ.

Koresh and his followers made a huge mistake. They had withdrawn from the world to live only for themselves. Koresh was obsessed with studying the Scriptures surrounding end times, and he had been able to convince many that his predictions were true, leading them head-on into tragedy.

○ The End Is October 1988

In August of 1988, the small Indiana congregation I pastored while in seminary received a book. Indeed, the entire association had received the same book. According to the material, after intensive study and prayer, an evangelist had “figured out” that on a particular day in October of 1988, the world would end. The first three months of my ministry there was spent trying to teach and preach about the futility of this kind of forecast-

ing. When I first denounced it, noting that Matthew’s Gospel records that even *Jesus* did not know when the world would end—and, therefore, certainly no human would ever figure it out—some people sneered. However, on the first Sunday of November 1988, it were as if a cloud had lifted. We can rest assured that no human can predict the end of time. That is God’s choice and God’s alone.

Questions

- Many believed that Jesus was a false prophet. How can we discern false prophets?
- Jesus calls us to be ready at any time for the Master’s return. Is living with that expectation more difficult than believing you actually can determine the date of Christ’s return? Explain.
- Is fear concerning the end of the world an indication of the condition of our faith?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Judgment Day

In Lyle Lovett's song "Church," one particular verse cautions that we had better remember the impending Judgment Day:

You know the preacher he kept preaching.

He told us, "I have one more thing to say:

Children, before you think of leaving,
You better think about the Judgment Day."

Ask your group what comes to mind when they hear the phrase "Judgment Day." Our text today reminds us that even though God is the only one who knows when time will end, this is not some event so fantasy-like that it will never occur. The question is, what must we do to be ready?

Questions

- Do you think that time will ever end? Explain.
- What are we to do to prepare for Christ's return?
- What does Jesus teach about "Judgment Day"?
- What does Matthew 25 reveal about the judgment of God?

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- According to today's text, what are the signs of the "end of the age"?
- What does Jesus instruct the disciples to do "in the meantime"?
- How does the image of the "faithful slave" help us better understand our relationship to God?

Questions for All Adults

- How can we identify false messiahs?
- In what trying situations have you remained faithful?
- How does this text instruct us to live?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What famous evangelists have preached about the end of the world?
- Why does Jesus emphasize that even he doesn't know when he will return?
- Whom do you either know or know of that has suffered for their faith?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What does your church teach about the second coming of Christ?
- Authority is a very important factor involved in establishing truth. How can you know when a minister or teacher has authentic authority?
- By what criteria do you establish who is dishonest in God's name?

Questions for Adults with Children

- What lesson from this text can children understand?
- How might this text aid your children with relationships they form at school?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ True or False Teachers

Most of us have a difficult time waiting. Even Dr. Suess does not write fondly of waiting. In *Oh, the Places You'll Go*, he illustrates “The Waiting Place”:

...You can get so confused
that you'll start in to race
down long wiggled roads at a
break-necking pace
and grind on for miles across
weirdish wild space,
headed, I fear, toward a most
useless place.
The Waiting Place...
...for people just waiting.

Give each person a copy of the Resource Kit page for this session and ask the group to complete the statements. Then ask volunteers to share their responses before asking these questions.

Questions

- When have you waited expectantly for something, only to be disappointed with the actual experience?
- What are your reactions to and attitudes toward waiting?
- Someone has said, “Good things come to those who wait.” What supports this statement and what disputes it?

○ The End?

Offer your group the following illustration:

The Danish philosopher, Kierkegaard, recounts a parable involving a theater in which a variety show is proceeding. Each show is more fantastic than the last, and the applause from the audience gets more raucous. Suddenly the manager comes forward. He apologizes for the interrup-

tion, but says that the theater is on fire, and he begs his patrons to leave in an orderly fashion. The audience thinks this is the most amusing turn of the evening, and hence, cheers thunderously. The manager again implores them to leave the burning building, yet again he is applauded vigorously. At last he can do no more. The fire races through the whole building and takes the fun-loving audience with it. “And so,” concludes Kierkegaard, “will our age, I sometimes think, go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators” (“End of the World,” 24 Sept 1999).

Questions

- Have the many contemporary “prophets” helped or hurt the message of Christ?
- Is religion today in danger of becoming just another form of entertainment? Explain.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ The End of the Age

Wars, earthquakes, famines, false messiahs— these are the signs of the end of the age. However, these are also the signs of *every* generation. Considering that, we need not be concerned with *when* the Lord will return, but rather, with what we will be found *doing* when he returns. Be the faithful slave, persistently hard at work. Read Matthew 25:31-46 aloud for your group as a reminder of what Jesus calls us to do. Close with a prayer, thanking God for the future and for the ability to do the work of the Kingdom.

5

GIVING AN
ACCOUNT*Revelation 20:11–21:8**Find Relevance*

Why do/should adults care about this session? There is an old saying which claims, “All’s well that ends well.” The less optimistic version, on the other hand, insists that, “all’s well that ends.”

Regardless of your outlook, believe it or not, Revelation is a very optimistic work. Too often people look into the deep, murky waters of this book and shrink back from its wonderfully creative images and symbols. Televangelists and wanna-be-prophets find fodder abundant in Revelation’s secretive codes. But the truth is that Revelation was and still remains a book of hope, hope that is not based on warm fuzzy feelings of what might be or what ought to be in a “perfect” world, but hope founded on a deep relational belief that this world belongs to God, that God is in control—that God will ultimately have the last word.

That is the promise of this Scripture: God *will* have the last word. Not death. Not Hades or the sea. Not anguish, fear, or even despair will have the last word. According to Revelation, when all former things have passed away, there will be God and God’s new Kingdom. Above all other truths, Revelation asserts that God is with us, God is for us, and therefore, we have nothing to fear. All’s well, says Revelation, because we know how “well” it will end.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? As is the case in Daniel and other examples of Jewish apocalyptic literature, the events of Revelation had already taken place by the time of its composition.

James Blevins believes that the book of Revelation was intended as a drama to be performed on the great stage at Ephesus. If his interpretation is correct, then it was originally meant to be watched. While this is not the only interpretation, it does illustrate that “watching” the events of this book as a play eliminates some of the questions about when the end will come as well as questions about the beast. The closing act would reveal that the one who is faithful will stand before God in judgment, be “forgiven,” and then be allowed through the Gates of Heaven.

The Scripture describes a white throne, like a judge’s bench. In this vision, people are standing before the throne and the books are opened. John sees a new heaven and new earth, and indeed, a new Jerusalem as well. Christ is acting as a defense attorney on behalf of the those who have followed him, and as a prosecutor to those who have denied him. Judgment is handed down, and each soul goes to the appropriate place.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Finding Hope

Share the following story with the group:

The school system in a large city had a program to help children with their schoolwork during stays in the city's hospitals. One day, a teacher assigned to the program received a routine call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with his regular class teacher. "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind." The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had told her that he had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of him, she stammered, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs." When she left, she didn't believe she had accomplished much. But the next day, a nurse asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back and responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live." Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He expressed it this way: "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they" (*Bits and Pieces*, 1991)?

Questions

- How can hope make a difference in our outlook on life?
- How can the hope of Christians be beneficial to non-Christians?
- As communities of faith, what is our role in providing hope?

○ Humor Me

Many people never read the book of Revelation, because its images seem frightening. Share the following anecdote with the group:

Two explorers were on a jungle safari when suddenly a ferocious lion jumped in front of them. "Keep calm," the first explorer whispered. "Remember what we read in that book on wild animals? If you stand perfectly still and look the lion in the eye, he will turn and run." "Sure," replied his companion. "You've read the book, and I've read the book. But has the lion read the book?"

Questions

- Which of the two explorers are you most like, the optimist or the pessimist? Explain.
- How does your optimism or pessimism affect how you view the future?
- How do you feel about trusting God with the future?
- Is giving your trust over to God a decision once made or an ongoing struggle? Explain.
- Do you ever speak openly of your difficulty trusting God? Why or why not?
- What role can our congregations play in deepening our capacity to trust?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ Worst-Case Scenario

Today's Scripture describes some of the most feared aspects of human life in the ancient world. For ancient Hebrews, "the sea" evoked great fear and intimidation. Sailors left home never to be seen again. Perhaps they did just drop off the face of the earth, but legends about great sea monsters abounded. It is no wonder that Revelation includes "the sea" in the list of things God will conquer in the new Kingdom. Have the group brainstorm a list of their worst fears. Compile their answers on a sheet of paper or newsprint.

Next, ask the group to discuss how our faith in God can help us overcome these fears. Encourage specific responses. For example, if people are fearful of death, ask how God's promises can help us overcome that fear. If people are fearful of war, ask what God has offered us to help us overcome that fear? Once you have worked through the list of fears, reread the Revelation text for today and remind the group that this passage tells us that this world is in God's control. God is working to redeem creation and will bring about a new day and a new Kingdom where we are promised to live without "fear." Conclude by praying for the faith to believe that this promise is true.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What happens before the White Throne?
- How is the visual image of heaven described in Revelation 21:1-4?
- What does the idea of a "new Jerusalem" suggest?

Questions for All Adults

- What warrants getting one's name recorded in the "Book of Life"?
- What words or symbols in the Revelation of John give you assurance and hope?
- What is your understanding of the judgment seat of God?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What is the difference between reading a story and having it portrayed visually?
- If John's original purpose was to comfort Christians, how might someone approaching the end of life find comfort in Revelation?
- When have you been held accountable for your actions and decisions?

Questions for Younger Adults

- "What would Jesus do?" is a popular question. How would our lives be different if we were to do what Jesus did?
- Considering this text, how do you view your future?
- Remembering the parable of the faithful and unfaithful slaves in Matthew 24, which one will receive eternal life at the judgment seat: the one who looked forward to it but did not prepare, or the one who thought nothing about it but worked towards it anyway?

Questions for Adults with Children

- Many popular movies depict the scenes literally from the book of Revelation. How do you calm a child's fears concerning what they hear about these movies?
- How can you model faithfulness for your child?
- How can you model God's grace for your children?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ Offering Hope

Many people suffer either because they have lost hope or because fear has overcome their faith. Ask your participants to form two groups, and assign both groups the task of creating a ministry of hope in your congregation. Encourage the groups to:

- Target specific needs or people.
- Plan small group activities that will allow people to share their fears and needs.
- Plan a means of offering prayer for those who need hope or are fearful.

Finally, ask both groups to share their ideas with the larger group. Combine lists and ask the class whether they are willing to take this idea on as a class project.

○ Trust Building

Read the following anecdote to the class and discuss the questions below:

I remember a time when our daughter Chris broke our trust by lying to her mother and me. One night she wanted to go to a party without permission and told us she was at her friend's house. When we found out the truth, there was a real scene between us. She had violated our trust. In the confrontation, I took a paper cup and filled it with water. Then I poked a hole in the bottom and let her watch as the water drained out. I gave her the cup and said that in order to restore our trust, she would have to be able to refill the cup, but that every incident like this one would put another hole in the cup. At that point, her eyes welled with tears as she questioned whether or not the cup

could be filled at all as long as it had a hole in it. And I replied, "It is very hard to build trust again." Chris learned a very important lesson that evening.

Questions

- What lesson did Chris learn through this experience?
- How do we work to build trust?
- How do we show that we value trust in our relationships?
- Are we as trustworthy as we expect others to be?
- How trustworthy do you think God finds us?

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

○ We'll Work till Jesus Comes

"Going to the throne of God" is another way of saying that we are accountable for everything we do. With millennial fervor running rampant for the last two years, it has been easy to forget our primary task: actually living out Jesus' teachings.

In the early 19th century, Elizabeth Mills wrote a hymn titled "We'll Work till Jesus Comes." These are the words of the first verse and the refrain:

O land of rest, for thee I sigh!
When will the moment come
When I shall lay my armor by
And dwell in peace at home?

Refrain

*We'll work till Jesus comes,
We'll work till Jesus comes,
We'll work till Jesus comes,
And we'll be gathered home.*

If your class knows the tune, sing the refrain together. If not, read the refrain aloud before asking the class to repeat it with you as a closing affirmation of God's promise of eternal life for the faithful.



FAITHFUL AND TRUE?

Faithful

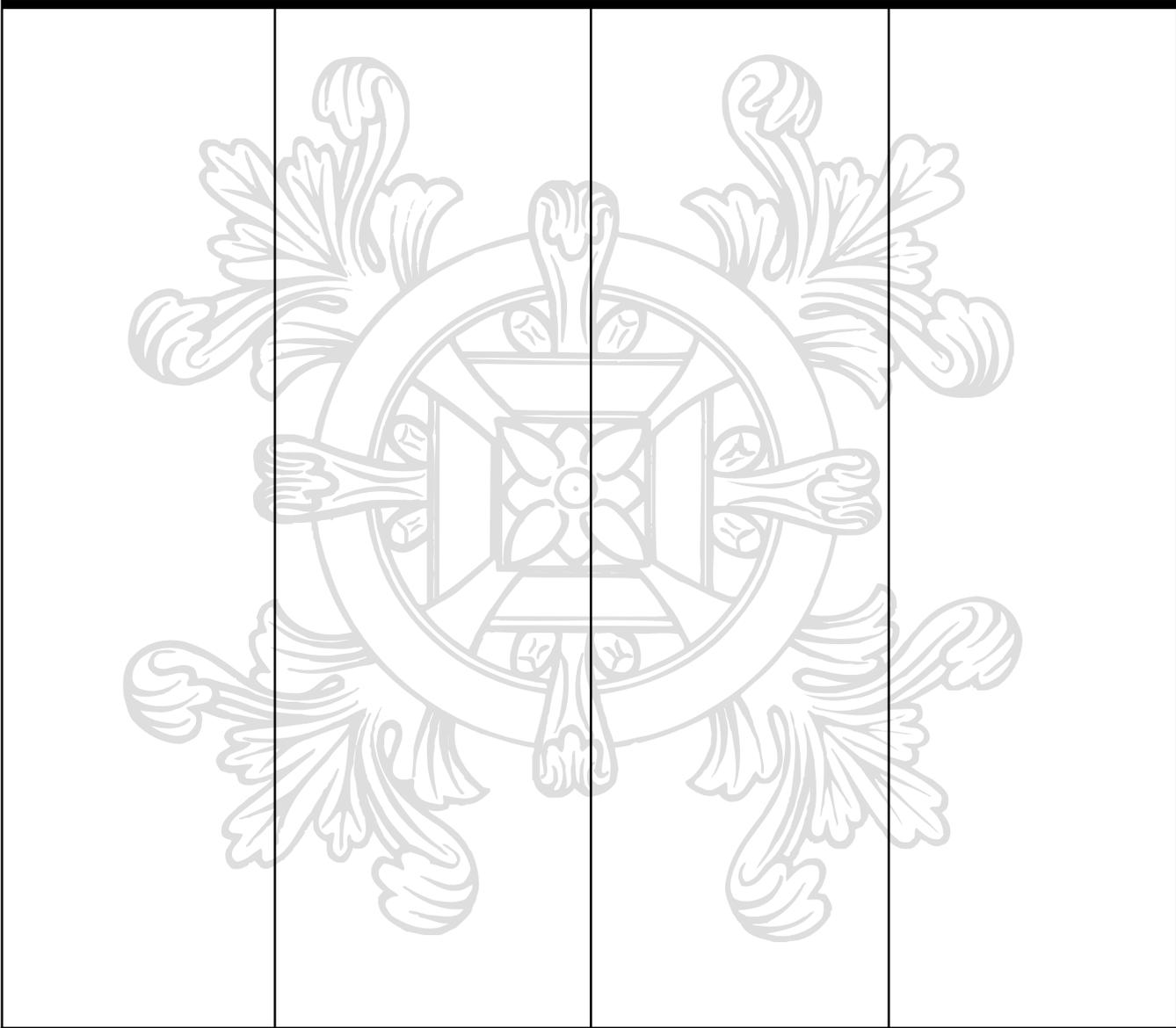
True

Being

Doing

Being

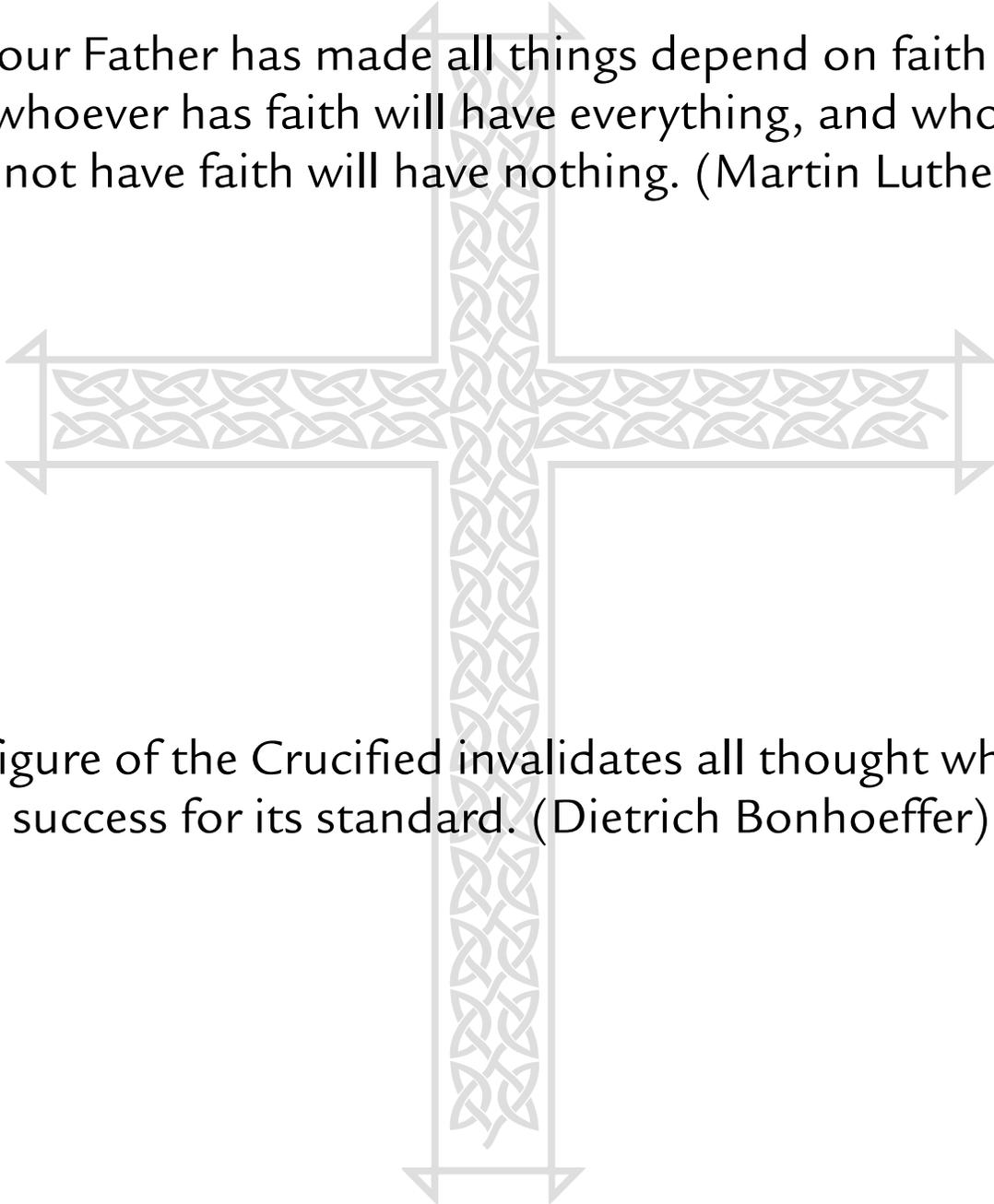
Doing





FAITHFUL VS. SUCCESSFUL

God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing. (Martin Luther)



The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)



THE WAITING PLACE

Complete the following sentences.

As a child, I remember having to wait for...

As a teenager, I couldn't wait to...

As an adult, I can hardly wait for...

I cannot bear waiting for...

When I'm waiting, I pass the time by...

When it comes to waiting, one of the things I've noticed about myself is...

