



# Intermediate Bible Teacher

March, April, May 2017

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SPRING QUARTER

*For Teachers of Teens Ages 12 Through 14*

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Edited and published quarterly by  
**THE INCORPORATED TRUSTEES OF THE  
GOSPEL WORKER SOCIETY  
UNION GOSPEL PRESS DIVISION**

**Rev. W. B. Musselman, Founder**

**Price: \$2.05 per quarter\*  
\$8.20 per year\***

*\*shipping and handling extra*

**ISBN 978-1-59843-520-7**



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# WRITER'S FORECAST

The unifying theme in this quarter's lessons is God's love. The four lessons in the first unit focus on the nature of God's love. In lesson 1, we read the Apostle John's bold declaration that God is the source of love. Without God, there would be no love.

Lesson 2 records the Apostle Paul's exciting news: We have been made alive by the love of God. At one time we were spiritually dead. However, because of God's overflowing love, we have been made alive.

Jesus called Himself the True Vine, as we learn in lesson 3. If we remain attached to the True Vine, we receive life and spiritual provision through our connection to Him. Also, we produce spiritual fruit.

God is merciful, lesson 4 tells us. He used the Prophet Joel to call the sinning people of Judah to turn from their sins and repent.

The five lessons of the second unit focus on the work of God's love. The study passage for lesson 5 is the twenty-third Psalm. This psalm pictures the Lord as the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep.

In lesson 6, we find that Nicodemus wanted to talk to Jesus, one teacher to another, but Jesus shocked him by saying that he had to be born again. Of course, Jesus was talking about a spiritual birth, but Nicodemus did not understand that.

Since April 16 is Easter Sunday, lesson 7 presents the resurrection story. In addition, there are brief passages from I Peter that highlight the power of the resurrection in the lives of believers.

Jesus died for sinners. That is the good news of lesson 8, because we all are sinners. However, when we put our full faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross, we are transformed from God's enemies into His friends.

Lesson 9 recounts how Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because He loves and cares for His sheep. In response, we know and love our Shepherd and follow Him.

The extent of God's love is highlighted in the four lessons of the third unit. All four lessons are based on the book of Jonah. In lesson 10, we read that God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn the wicked people living in that city that judgment was coming. Instead of obeying God, Jonah ran from God's call and ended up in the belly of a great fish. Of course, that was not the end of the story.

Jonah was a victim of his own bad choices. In lesson 11, we see that he came to his senses and called out to God from the great fish's belly. In response to Jonah's prayer of repentance, God acted to save his life.

Jonah received a second chance to carry out his God-given task to preach to the people of Nineveh. Then, as lesson 12 shows, the people of Nineveh got a second chance. When they repented and changed their evil ways, God changed His mind about destroying the city.

Jonah had no compassion or love for the people of Nineveh. He actually was angry when God chose not to destroy them. The stark contrast between God's universal mercy and love and the prophet's narrow nationalism becomes obvious in lesson 13.

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# John and Jonah

You probably would never expect to find the names of the Bible characters John and Jonah in the same sentence, let alone in the same title. John was the New Testament “apostle of love,” but Jonah was a reluctant Old Testament prophet who answered God’s call only after God backed him into a corner—and then he wanted his preaching ministry to be a total failure. Jonah was actually angry when the people of Nineveh responded positively to his preaching and God changed His mind about pouring out His wrath on them.

However, John and Jonah may have had more in common than appears at first glance—beyond the fact that both names begin with the letter *J*. Both figure prominently in this quarter’s lessons. Of the first nine lessons of the quarter, the writings of the Apostle John are featured in all but four of those lessons. Then the last four lessons of the quarter are all based on the deeds, misdeeds, and reluctant ministry of Jonah.

So by taking a closer look at both John and Jonah, we can gain a better understanding of many of this quarter’s lessons.

The Apostle John is remembered fondly as the apostle of love. Again and again in his letters, he urged believers to “love one another” (I John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11; II John 1:5). According to Christian tradition, when John was a very old man, well into his nineties, he repeatedly exhorted the believers in the church at Ephesus to “love one another.”

However, John was not always a kindly church elder urging believers to express Christian love to other people. When he and his brother, James, were young disciples of Jesus, the Master gave them the epithet “Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder” (Mark



3:17). Apparently, that epithet was appropriate. The young disciples tended to be impetuous and could actually be ill-tempered and even intolerant.

On one occasion, Jesus’ disciples saw someone who was not a part of their group casting out demons. Instead of rejoicing because someone else was also opposing Satan, they ordered him to stop. Apparently they thought they had an exclusive right to be the contenders against evil.

When John reported this incident to Jesus, no doubt expecting a commendation from the Master, Jesus actually rebuked the disciples with the admonition, “Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:50).

Sometime later, Jesus passed through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem. Since He was going to Jerusalem, He was not well received by the Samaritans. This stirred up the anger of the “sons of thunder.” They went to Jesus and asked for His approval for them to call down fire from heaven to consume the inhospitable Samaritans (Luke 9:54)—not exactly

the kind of attitude expected from the apostle of love!

Again, Jesus corrected His intolerant disciples. "He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). The "spirit" Jesus referred to was not the spirit of love but the spirit of intolerance and anger and prejudice. John and his brother had much to learn about the Christlike attitude that is required of true followers of Jesus.

To his credit, John learned much about the true nature of love from his close association with Jesus. Since he was young and impetuous, it took a while for John to incorporate those lessons on love into his personal lifestyle. However, he did grow and develop and mature in his understanding of love.

When John stood at the cross with the Master's mother, Jesus confidently entrusted the care of His mother to this disciple (John 19:26-27). No doubt Jesus' emphasis on love in His teachings and His lifestyle was having a positive effect on John's attitude. He still had much to learn about love, but he was not the intolerant hothead that he had been.

As John showed himself to be intolerant and prejudicial, so did Jonah. When God told him to go to Nineveh and warn the wicked citizens of that pagan city that divine judgment was coming, Jonah ran away from God's call. Jonah was not afraid to go to Nineveh—at least that was not his primary reason for not wanting to go. He simply did not want to be a missionary to Nineveh. He did not want the people of Nineveh to hear God's message of impending judgment and repent. He wanted God to destroy them.

When Jonah did communicate God's message and the Ninevites repented and God stayed His hand of judgment, Jonah was downright angry. He lamented to God, "I fled before unto

Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (Jonah 4:2).

The Apostle Paul asked rhetorically, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). Jonah understood that formula. He knew that if he did not go to Nineveh and preach, the people would not hear. If they did not hear, they would not repent. And if they did not repent, God would not withhold His hand of judgment.

David Livingstone was the great missionary pathfinder who took the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of central Africa. He was inspired to become a missionary when he heard Robert Moffatt express his concern for the unsaved of Africa, saying, "In the vast plain to the north I have sometimes seen, in the morning sun, the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been." Robert Moffatt had a heart of compassion for those who needed to hear the good news about Jesus Christ.

Jonah did not have that heart of compassion. His heart was confined by narrow nationalism and prejudice. He believed God's salvation was only for Israelites, and other people did not deserve to be saved. His short book ends before we discover whether he ever changed that prejudicial mindset.

We know that the Apostle John matured from intolerance and prejudice to compassion and love. In his later years, he became an outspoken proponent of love. We can only hope that Jonah lived long enough to see the error of his prejudicial attitude and that in his later years, he was able to proudly declare that he was the preacher who saved the city of Nineveh from divine judgment.

## Scripture Lesson Text

**1 JOHN 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

**8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.**

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

**10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

**12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.**

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spir'it.

**14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.**

15 Whosoever shall confess that Je'sus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

**16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

**18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**

19 We love him, because he first loved us.

### NOTES

# The Source of All Love

Lesson: I John 4:7-19

Read: I John 4:7-19

TIME: about A.D. 90-95

PLACE: probably from Ephesus

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11).

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## *Lesson and Its Truth*

Love was one of the favorite themes of the Apostle John. In his three short letters, he repeatedly called for believers to love one another.

We are not able to love other people because we are naturally kind and loving. The ugly truth is that we were born sinful and selfish. We thought of ourselves first, not others. However, when we accepted Christ by faith, we were transformed, and our hearts were filled with the love of God. That is why we are able to do what we could never do on our own.

### **LOVE COMES FROM GOD— I John 4:7-8**

We are able to love other people because we have access to the source of love. When John told us to "love one another," he also told us how that is possible: because love comes from God.

You may wonder, "If God is the source of love and love comes from God, how are people who reject God able to love?" Love is a universal experience, not simply a Christian experience. Unsaved people are able to feel and express love, but even their love comes from God. They may not believe in God or even admit that He exists, but they still depend on Him for the love they have for their family members and friends.

Of course, most of what the world calls "love" is not love at all. It is selfish and self-centered emotion focused on "me"—what makes me feel good and what pleases me. The other person's role in the relationship is simply to make me happy and to feel good about myself.

God calls us to a higher level of love. He calls us to a level of love that is unconditional and unselfish, which puts others first and thinks first of the other person. This level of love is possible only through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Love is the essence of God's character. John did not say, "God is loving." He said, "God is love" (I John 4:8). Love does not describe God's actions; love is the essence of His character. God is not loving in a sentimental or emotional sense; He is the very embodiment of love. He is love personified.

A person we may consider loving can do some truly unloving things. However, since God is love, He will always be true to who He is. Everything He does is consistent with His nature of love.

### **GOD PROVED HIS LOVE FOR US— I John 4:9-10**

How do we know that God really loves us? He proved it by His great act of love: sending His Son to be the Sav-