

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: January 21, 2018

Lesson Title: "Value All"

Lesson Passage: Acts 16:16-19; Psalm 139:13-16

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The passages of scripture in the lesson passage feature two persons who were abused by others. Acts 16:16-19 tells us the story of Paul's encounter with a poor slave girl, whose purported fortune-telling ability was being exploited by her owners. And some interpreters believe Psalm 139 comes from a man who has been falsely accused by his enemies of some sort of wrongdoing, though he is certain that he will be acquitted, because his innocence is obvious to God, who knows him completely. Both passages remind us that every human being should be valued as a creation of God.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL

(1) Explain how the situation that led to mob violence against Paul and Silas in Philippi relates to the theme of this lesson. (2) Explain how awareness of God's intimate knowledge of the psalmist was reassuring, rather than intimidating.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, ask class members to turn to Proverbs 31. Recall that this chapter is well-known for its description of an ideal housewife, in verses 10-31, because that passage has been used as a text for many Mother's Day sermons. But make this point: Verses 8-9 are less well known, because they usually get less attention; yet, they are related to a major biblical doctrine, the importance of every individual on earth. Read Psalm 8:4-5, then note that this passage makes it clear that we are important not because of who we are, but because of who our Creator is ("So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them," Gen. 1:7). Relate this to the present lesson: The writer of Psalm 139 elaborates on this theme, painting an amazing picture of God's intimate knowledge of him. And in the episode described in Acts 16:16-19, the apostle Paul dramatized the importance of even an obscure individual by stopping to rescue a demented slave girl from the abuse she was suffering at the hands of her masters.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Review the scene in Philippi, described in Acts 16:16-19 (part of our lesson on January 7), where Paul and Silas fell victim to mob violence after they had helped a deranged slave girl. Recall that Paul had expelled the evil spirit that inhabited her (v.18), but that his act of mercy had ruined the lucrative business of her owners, who had been exploiting her mental handicap for profit; so they retaliated by accusing the apostles of disturbing the peace (Acts 16:19). APPLICATION: They*

were treating a human being like merchandise, a social evil that is rampant in the form of human trafficking (sexual exploitation and forced labor) even in our day. (An estimated 300,000 Americans under 18 years of age are lured into the commercial sex trade every year.)

2. *Summarize the main theme of Psalm 139, which is primarily a description of God's complete knowledge of the psalmist, the point being that God knows he is innocent of the scandalous charges of his enemies:* (1) "You have searched me and known me" (v. 1) might be rendered "you have seen inside my heart, there is nothing about me you don't know." (2) The Lord's knowledge extends even to the psalmist's unspoken thoughts. God knows the meaning of every word he utters before it is spoken (v. 4). (3) "Thou dost beset me behind and before" (v. 5, RSV) means "You are all around me on every side" (TEV). (4) "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" in verse 6 is the psalmist's confession that God's knowledge of him is so complete that it is beyond his own understanding. (5) Verses 11-12 emphasize the impossibility of hiding from the presence of God. It would be futile to flee from the Lord by hiding in the darkness (v. 11), because, with God, there is no difference between darkness and light (v. 12).

3. *Comment on Psalm 139:13-16, where the psalmist notes that the Creator's knowledge of him even preceded his birth:* (1) In verse 13 he acknowledges that God created him in his mother's womb. APPLICATION: Genesis 2:3 tells us that God "rested" (i.e., "paused") on the seventh day of creation; but he did not conclude his work of creation. The Creator continues his work even today; for every baby's birth is a creative act of God. (*Invite class members to comment on the element of worship in their experiences related to the birth of children.*) (2) The Hebrew verb that is translated "knit me together" in 139:13b means "weave" or "shape." (3) The first line of verse 14 is, "I praise you, for I am awesomely, wondrously made." The second line means, "your works are wonderful." And the meaning of the third line is either "my *nephesh* knows it well" or "You, God, know my *nephesh* well." NOTE: The Hebrew term "*nephesh*" referred to the inner being of a person, what we often mean by "the soul." (4) The meaning of verse 15 in Hebrew is something like, "my skeleton was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret, intricately arranged in the depths of the earth." NOTE: Most biblical interpreters agree that "the depths of the earth" is a figurative expression that refers to the mother's womb. (5) The Hebrew noun translated "my unformed substance" (v. 16a, RSV) probably is equivalent to "embryo" in modern English. And "the days that were formed for me" (v. 16) refers to the days of his whole life.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Observe that the theme that unites the two selections of scripture in the Lesson Passage is vividly symbolized in Matt. 10:29-31. Read these verses, then make the point that all human beings (regardless of their age, ethnicity and social status) are of value to God, and should be valued by God's people.