PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

**1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (NIV)** • “I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God this confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 (NIV)** • “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

**Revelation 14:12 (NIV)** • “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”

**Proverbs 20:6 (NIV)** • “Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?”

**Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)** • “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

**Philippians 1:6 (NIV)** • “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

**Hebrews 12:2, 3 (NKJV)** • “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”
B. WHAT'S TO BE SAID ABOUT “IDENTITY (2): OVER TIME”

As part of a four-part series on identity, this lesson picks up the topic of who we are by looking at the journey of James and John as they mature as followers of Christ. This week’s and next week’s lessons are a study on what happens to the people who are closest to Christ. How do their weaknesses and insecurities get exposed, and more important, how does their communion with Christ shape their identity over the long haul? They came a long way from their calling at the seashore, and from their mother-driven career plans. They grew to be certain about their purpose, and sure about who they were in Christ.

Teens are just beginning to shape their sense of identity, and as the biblical stories of real people are told, they can be affirmed in the journey. This lesson will survey the pivotal points in their journey with Christ. The essential point of this lesson is that understanding who we are in Christ happens over time as we walk with Him. Discipleship is a step-by-step walk alongside the Savior, and we learn more about who we are as we discover who He is.

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH “IDENTITY (2): OVER TIME”

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:
1. Peruse the lives of James and John to create a background to learning about their identity in Christ.
2. Identify the attributes of a healthy identity in Christ.
3. Choose to follow the example of these two brothers to submit to the plan Christ has for them.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) bring an old item you, the teacher, cannot throw away; ask two or three students beforehand to do the same; (Activity B) list of famous brothers or sisters, chalkboard or flipchart, paper, pens or pencils.
A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • The purpose of this activity is to show how our old favorite things (clothes, stuffed animals) that we are unwilling to throw out illustrate an aspect of our identity as disciples of Christ. That favorite sweatshirt that is so comfortable has been with you for years. The ratty old bunny with one ear, while useless to some, might be priceless to the owner. So many stories are tied to things like this. This exercise will get students in the class to share an example of similar items in their household that either belong to them or someone in their family.

Get set • Bring to class an example of an old item that you just can’t throw away. Share some of the stories and reasons that it is something you keep. You might ask a few students you know to bring an example to class for another visual example or two.

Go • Say: This is my favorite _________ (sweatshirt. It was with me in college, mission trips, softball tournaments, backpacking trips). Every household has something they hang on to. I want you to tell us about an item you or someone in your household won’t get rid of. As they share about these items have them explain why they think the item they mention is so valuable to them or their family.

Debriefing • Ask: We have shared about these old, worn-out items, but what do they illustrate about our relationship with God? (In some cases these items have been with people through different stages: early childhood—[stuffed animals and blankets].) Describe some of the stages of the Christian life you have been through.

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • James and John had the nickname “Sons of Thunder” given to them. This exercise will be about famous brothers (or sisters) and the way nicknames are given to us and how they illustrate our qualities—both negative and positive.

Get set • Make a preliminary list of biblical brothers, sisters, or siblings that you can come up with that are famous. This activity seems easy at first, but it gets harder. Here are a few: Cain and Abel; Ham, Shem, and Japheth; Jacob and Esau; Moses, Aaron, and Miriam; Lazarus, Mary, and Martha; Joseph and his 11 brothers; Leah and Rachel; the prodigal son and his brother; James and John; Peter and Andrew, et cetera.

Go • Have the students make up appropriate nicknames for each set of siblings that will convey who they are without saying their names.

Have students share their nicknames and see if the other students can guess to whom they are referring. The students will give the nickname and the other groups will guess to whom the nickname refers.

Debriefing • Ask: Were the nicknames you chose based on one single event in the lives of the siblings, or the culmination of many events? How difficult was it to figure out which nicknames belonged to whom? Why? Why do you think James and John were nicknamed “Sons of Thunder”?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell one or more of the following stories:

At the end of the Summer Olympics, athletes participate in a special event, retracing the long-distance run from which the Olympic event got its name. In 490 B.C. Pheidippides ran 26 miles to warn of the impending attack of the Persians upon his country. The route began in Marathon and ended in Sparta. Soon after he reached Sparta, Pheidippides died.

Analyzing lunar records, astronomers at Texas State University believe the cause of his death was the result of heat stroke. Their research indicates the runner may have raced in temperatures reaching 102 degrees. (Modern runners begin in the evening.) The New Scientist quotes researcher Russell Doescher as saying: “It seems plausible that someone running for all
he’s got, trying to save his fellow citizens, could keel over and die.”

S. I. McMillen, in his book *None of These Diseases*, tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, “Are you a leader?”

Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, “No,” and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: “Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower.”

**Debriefing • Ask:** What qualities do you imagine were so ingrained in Pheidippides that he could do what he did? What do you think made it possible for him to sacrifice himself to warn his people of danger? What do Pheidippides and the young college applicant have in common? (Unselfishness, focusing on the job to be done rather than on self, humility) **How are these qualities essential for the Christian life?**

**4 CONNECTING**

**A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM**

**Present the following ideas in your own words:**

While the disciples of Christ are honored heroes of the Christian faith, they are also just people like you and me. They had moments of greatness and times in which they slipped and fell. Probably, most of the stories of their lives were ordinary and uneventful. But over the course of their journey, James and John discovered more and more about Jesus and became more and more devoted to Him. In fact, in some ways, they became more and more like Him. The things that were important to Christ became important to them. In this section we are going to survey the life of these two brothers by looking at the major events of their lives as they are recorded in the Bible.

Use the handout provided (pp. 87, 88), and have the students divide into groups of two to four and work through this exercise answering the questions at the top of the handout. When the students have finished answering the questions in groups, invite them to report to the rest of the class.

**B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION**

**Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath’s section of the lesson.**

**Ask:** Are you willing and able? Most people want the benefits of exit row seating—extra leg room—but how many people want to sit there because they feel as if they could really help in an emergency?

**Say:** In fact, most people who request an exit row seat may be qualified to be of assistance, but their primary reason for being there is their own comfort. James and John are recorded as “trying to sit in the exit row seat” for the wrong reason. Let’s find and read aloud the story in Matthew 20:20-28 and Mark 10:35-45. Ask for volunteers.

**Ask:** In what ways do you think the illustration applies to this story?

**C. CONNECTING TO LIFE**

**Pose the following scenario:**

One junior high school was voting on class officers for the eighth grade. Several very popular students were campaigning for the privilege of becoming class president, while some of the less-noticed students watched. While there wasn’t much work for an eighth-grade class president to do other than fund-raising and planning the eighth-grade graduation, there was
still a serious commotion when it came time to choose officers.

Instead of choosing the popular person who made a big speech, the class chose the student who printed all the advertisements, set up the chairs, and quietly did the groundwork for the elections. Someone who noticed his diligence nominated him. The other candidates had had their friends nominate them.

**Debriefing: Ask:** What do you think about students who run for class office? How do they get chosen? Why do you think people aspire to leadership? While there is nothing wrong with aspiring to leadership, do you think being president or captain or first chair makes you a leader? What characteristics do you value in a leader? Typically, do you think officers/leaders are chosen because they are capable or because they are well liked?

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### A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

**Share the following ideas in your own words.**

In the student lesson, the last section, entitled “Applying,” has a graphic drawing of the rings of a tree. Many of you completed the Me box before class. As you know, each ring represents a full season of growth. Some years there is more growth than others. Some years there is more growth on one side of the tree than on the other. But a ring is made only when all the elements of growth take place.

The purpose of our activity this morning is to mark out the seasons of growth for James and John as best you can.

James and John were obviously deeply devoted to Christ but had to learn more about Him in order to discover what their role was in His kingdom. The more they learned about Christ, the more they came into contact with opportunities to find their place in His kingdom.

But more important, use this graphic to review your own growth. You may have had some pretty easy years but then suffered something such as the loss of a family member or some other tragedy. At some time you may have held God at a distance, but later returned to Him, making a renewed commitment. Take some time to reflect on your own journey and think about what the future may hold for you as a follower of Christ.

**NOTE TO TEACHER:** You don’t necessarily want to ask students to share details, but you can ask them whether or not the exercise helped them look at the major events of their spiritual life.

**Debriefing • Ask:** How did you see the seasons of your own growth—chronological, by major events and stories, by what happened with close relationships, church events? Knowing that the work of spiritual growth takes place over a lifetime, were you able to see growth in your own life? Did you identify at all with any of James’ and John’s growth experiences?

### B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. To what other characters in Scripture could you easily give nicknames that are unmistakably appropriate for them?
2. How should a person relate to their successes and failures as they follow Christ in the journey of discipleship?
3. How do you make sure you have the right motivation for following Christ? (Compare it to people’s motivations to sit in the exit row of an airplane.)
4. Who do you know who follows Christ, in success or failure, simply because they are devoted to Him?
5. What other stories from Scripture remind you of people who are devoted to God without any regard for what others will think or say of them?
6. What areas of your life might you need to reevaluate and boldly follow Christ in no matter what?
7. What are the qualities of leadership you think are most important? What qualities of a disciple are most needed today?
CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

No one grows close to God overnight. Obviously, there are big moments in our lives that are reference points, but ultimately we grow closer to Christ over seasons of success and failure. It seems as if the one element in common for disciples who really know Jesus and know who they are is that they always come back to being a devoted friend of the Savior. James and John had things wrong on many occasions, and on some they had them right. But over the long haul of their short lives they never left their Friend, and they never gave up. They learned a lot about themselves as they discovered who Jesus was and, as a result, became two tremendously influential people in the Christian story.

Through all their wild dreams about being on the left and the right, Jesus rerouted their thinking to things like humility, service, and faithfulness. And, as they chose to focus on those things, look where they ended up. It gives new meaning to the passage that says, “For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 14:11, NIV).
Sons of Thunder

Directions: Read through the summary provided of James’s and John’s interaction with Jesus. Mark or highlight what you think are the most important events in their experience with Jesus. Then answer the questions about their lives. Look up any of the stories or passages referred to in the Bible for further clarification.

1. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were two of Jesus’ 12 apostles. Their father was a fisherman; their mother, Salome, often cared for Jesus’ daily needs (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40, 41).

   In lists of the twelve apostles, James and his brother John always form a group of four with two other brothers, Peter and Andrew. The four were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Their call to follow Jesus is the first recorded event after the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20).

2. James and John must have contributed a spirited and headstrong element to Jesus’ band of followers, because Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17).

3. On one occasion (Luke 9:51-56), when a Samaritan village refused to accept Jesus, the two asked Jesus to call down fire in revenge, as the prophet Elijah once had done (2 Kings 1:10, 12).

4. On another occasion, they earned the anger of their fellow disciples by asking if they could sit on Jesus’ right and left hands in glory (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

5. James was one of three disciples—Peter, James, and John—whom Jesus took along privately on three special occasions. The three accompanied Him when He healed the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51); they witnessed His transfiguration (Matthew 17:1, 2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); and they were also with Him in His agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33).

6. After the Resurrection, however, John became the more prominent, probably because of his association with Peter (Acts 3:1; 8:14). He was present when Peter healed the lame man in the temple. Together with Peter he bore witness before the Sanhedrin to his faith in Jesus Christ. The boldness of their testimony brought the hostility of the Sanhedrin (Acts 3; 4).

7. Following the ascension of Jesus, John continued in a prominent position of leadership among the disciples (Acts 1:13).

8. James is never mentioned apart from his brother John in the New Testament, even at his death (Acts 12:2). When the brothers are mentioned in the Gospels, James is always mentioned first, probably because he was the older. After the execution of James by Herod Agrippa I, about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1, 2), John is not heard of again in Acts.

9. When the apostles in Jerusalem received word of the evangelization of Samaria, they sent Peter...
and John to investigate whether the conversions were genuine (Acts 8:14-25).

**QUESTIONS:**

Which event is the most important? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think they were part of Jesus’ inner circle? What are some of the stories that show them as part of the inner circle?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What story shows them at their weakest and what story shows them at their best?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

When in their journey do you think they “got it” or came to a deeper understanding of Jesus and their true role in His kingdom?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

If you had to tell one story about James and John that would depict what they were really like most of the time, which story would you pick? Why?

________________________________________________________________________
Sabbath
FOR STUDY

» Memory Text: “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls” (Hebrews 12:2, 3, NKJV).

» Our Beliefs, no. 11, Growing in Christ: “We are also called to follow Christ’s example by compassionately ministering to the physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of humanity. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience.”

» Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 136, 137

JAMES AND JOHN IN EXIT ROW 33 A AND D

Since I fly enough to get sick of it but not enough to earn first-class upgrades, I find that jockeying for the exit row is an important part of ensuring a more comfortable flight. But recently I was shaken from my shortsighted approach to getting my seat assignments while sitting comfortably on the aisle of a luxuriously roomy exit row.

After carefully putting my carry-on bags away, I stretched my legs out fully in front of me like a cat on an old couch winding down for a lazy nap. There was so much room I could have easily practiced putting a golf ball on the carpet that spanned before me. Exit row, I thought to myself. This is good.

The normal routine ensued as unfortunate travelers stumbled over one another getting into their seats and trying to find space for the carry-on bags in the sparse room that remained around their feet. Then a flight attendant knelt down and looked me right in the face and asked, “Do you know you are sitting in an emergency exit row?”

Are you kidding? I thought to myself.

She continued patiently, “Are you willing and able to do the required things listed on the exit card in the seat compartment in front of you?”

“Yes, of course,” I said. It was clear to me that she took the exit row thing more seriously than I had anticipated. It was also clear that she saw through my purpose for being there. I was willing and able—but I thought that was a reference to having more room than everyone else and possibly taking a nap.

She asked me to read the card, and said she would return.

I read the card. OK, I read some of the card. I mean, I looked at the pictures.

She returned and reminded me, “In case of an emergency I’ll be depending on you to open
that door. Dozens of other people will also be relying on you."

It was then that I realized that the exit row is a place of privilege. Not the kind of privilege in which you are the beneficiary—but the kind of privilege in which you experience the distinct Christlike honor of putting others before yourself. Those who sit in the exit row truly need to be willing and able to help others.

I still try to get the exit row seat, and for the most part it’s still because of the extra legroom. But when I sit down, I take a second or two to remind myself that if anything should happen, I need to be willing to let others get off the plane safely, before I do. I hope that never gets tested. But if it does, I want to be like Jesus, James, and John—I want to be willing and able.—Pastor Troy.

Sunday
RESPONDING

» Read James 1:5, 6.

» Jeff’s brother Jim returned from military service for the holidays. He slept in Jeff’s room, and so they would talk at night. Jim was saying some things that caused Jeff to be concerned about his brother’s spiritual condition. Jim seems to be questioning whether God answers prayer or if going to church really matters. Jim is searching for answers.

» Jeff is too young to know what it is like to have to be ready to go to war. He doesn’t have a lot to worry about except whether he will score points in the basketball game. He doesn’t feel he has a right to say anything to his brother but wants to encourage him to keep talking to God. How do you think he should go about doing that? What kinds of things would you say to be encouraging? What would you avoid saying?

Monday
BIBLE ANSWERS ON GROWING IN CHRIST

» Read Matthew 20:25-28; Romans 8:38, 39; 2 Peter 2:9.

» No matter where you are on your walk (beginning, middle, or end) with the Lord, He is there with you. There is nothing you will encounter that He has not conquered. In everything we can trust God to see us through.

» Where are you on your walk with God?

» In what ways do you serve the Lord, your family, and others each day?

» Fill in the blanks.

“For we do not _______ against _______ and _______, but against _______, against _______, against the _______ of the _______ of this age, against _______ hosts of _______ in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the _______ _______ _______, that you may be _______ to _______ in the evil day, and having done all, to _______. Stand therefore, having _______ _______ _______ with _______; above all, _______ the _______ _______; and the _______ _______ _______ with which _______ will be able to _______ the _______ _______ of the wicked one. And _______ the _______ _______ _______, and the _______
Tuesday

REFLECTING


» A popular catchphrase today is “It’s a process.” When it comes to life in the kingdom of God, that’s not a bad way to look at it. For James and John to isolate one moment of greatness or failure to mark their lives as disciples would be ridiculous. Yet people often allow their own failures to be final or their success to carry them too far. The book The Desire of Ages describes beautifully how Jesus dealt with these two disciples and their determined quest for glory: “Jesus bears tenderly with them, not rebuking their selfishness in seeking preference above their brethren. He reads their hearts, He knows the depth of their attachment to Him” (p. 548).

> Don’t you just love that about Jesus? Wherever you are in the journey, know that even when you don’t know what is going on, the Savior knows who you are and where you are—and He patiently guides you closer to Himself. On many occasions the choice to serve yourself will rise up in conflict with the choice to serve others. But those who have chosen to remain close to Christ get to know Him, and learn a few things about themselves “in the process.”

Wednesday

BIBLE INSIGHTS

» Find the verses that go with the reference and fill in the blanks.

___ 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, NIV
___ Proverbs 20:6, NIV
___ Proverbs 28:20, NIV
___ Revelation 14:12, NIV
___ Hebrews 12:2, 3, NIV
___ Philippians 1:6, NIV

A. “Fixing our ______ on Jesus, the pioneer and _______ of faith. For the joy set before him he _______ the cross, scorning its _______ , and sat down at the _______ hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such _______ from _______ , so that you will not grow ______ and lose _______ .”

B. “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as _______ of _______ and as those _______ with the mysteries ______ has _______. Now it is _______ that those who have been given a ______ must prove _______ .”

C. “This calls for _______ endurance on the part of the ______ of ______ who ______ his commandments and remain _______ to Jesus.”

D. “A _______ person will be richly _______ , but one _______ to get rich will not go _______. ”

E. “Many _______ to have _______ love, but a _______ person who can find?”

F. “Being confident of this, that he who began a _______ in you will _______ it on to _______ until the day of Christ Jesus.”
Thursday

CONNECTING

» Read Revelation 14:12.

» Review the memory verse.

» Every once in a while it is good for young people to wonder where the road ahead may lead them. It is equally important not to lock in too tightly on the picture either—ask James and John if they ended up where they envisioned, and they would say both no and yes.

» No. James was the first apostle to lose his life at the very beginning of the growth of the Christian church. His impact on the early church was huge, and the enemy of the church thought that putting him to death would stall the cause. Instead, the church grew. John was the last of Christ’s disciples to die. The Roman authorities tried to kill him by boiling him in oil, but they failed. Then John wrote some of the most powerful statements about Christ ever written. Instead of being on the left and the right, James and John were the first and the last. But their legacy of devotion continues.

» Yes. They would say yes because they ended up exactly where they always wanted to be—in close relationship to their Friend and Lord, Jesus. Throughout their journey their primary purpose was to be close to Him, and in being close to Him they found no better place to be. What about you? Success or failure, whether you know where you will end up or not, you can rest in the knowledge that Jesus will be right there. What else would you want? What else could you ask for?

Friday

APPLYING

» Read Philippians 1:6.

» The graphic on the next page depicts the rings on a tree. Each ring is a season of growth. Indicate the seasons of your own growth in the Me box, marking pivotal moments of success and failure. One of the best ways to get started is to try to identify the five most significant events of your life. Some examples might be getting to know Christ, your baptism, sharing your conversion story, winning someone to the Lord, a friend’s moving away, a family member’s death, a disaster of some kind, or making a new friend at school. Try to include events that describe your relationship to God. You will complete the James and John box in class on Sabbath.