

Aim of lesson

We have already considered in these notes the promises made to Abraham, to Israel and to David. The aim of this lesson is to make the young people aware of other promises God has also made, which are also relevant to us today.

Bible background

Romans 8:28; Matthew 28:20; Mark 10:28-31; Psalm 34:7; 2 Timothy 4:8

Preparation required

Be prepared for the lesson to progress in one of two directions, depending on how the young people respond to your questions about the major Old Testament promises. If they have not dealt with this subject you may prefer to spend a week on the appropriate lesson from Part 1 of The Way of Life.

Read through these notes and those in the students' book so that you are familiar with the material.

Suggested outline of lesson

Revise the main promises made by God to Eve, Abraham, and David. Try to emphasize that these are 'great and precious promises' not in an academic sense but are good news for us personally. Explain that scripture also includes more promises than these - many of which have a very personal bearing on the disciples of Christ.

Look at 2 Peter 1:1-5, and see the important points that are made there for our personal lives.

1. The promises are not just to the patriarchs but to us (v4). Think about the impact that the promises had on the lives of the likes of Abraham, and consider that we are meant to react in just the same way.
2. Think about the word 'promise'. When we make a promise we are committing ourselves to some action. That is what God's promises are too; he is not simply predicting what is going to happen but declaring his determination to make it happen.
3. The purpose of the promises is so that we 'might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust' (AV). So they should change the way we live our lives, and in the end make us like the God who made us.

4. The promises should commit us to personal effort, and a sincere attempt to grow in grace; 'make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge' (NIV).

Get the young people to read the comments by William Barclay. Don't get bogged down in the Greek words, but concentrate on what they mean. They add up to a public announcement of something that is freely offered to anyone, like the announcement of a ruler to hold public games to which everyone was invited. The Almighty God, in turn, is making promises to his people, which anyone may receive - if (an important word) they wish.

There are five examples. For each one you could consider some or all of the following questions:

- What does the promise really mean in practice?
- Does it depend on us in any way, or is it true whatever we do?
- If it does depend on us, what can we do to ensure that the promise comes true?
- Is it likely to bring dramatic, obvious, immediate results in our lives, or would we expect God to work slowly over many years?

Examples

1. Romans 8:28. Try to get the young people to see that God works in our lives to improve us. This may not always be the way we would plan it and we have a responsibility to learn from everything that happens to us. The examples of many biblical characters show that the lives of believers are no easier than anyone else's. The difference lies in our perception of the hand of God and our faith in him.
2. Matthew 28:20. 'I am with you always.' This is an incredible promise especially when we think that Jesus is not with us to condemn. Why do we forget this promise? How can we encourage ourselves to remember it? Read the Bible more? Talk to each other more? Write it on a poster for the wall?
3. Mark 10:28-31 We may be called upon to stick up for what we know to be right. God will recognise this if it means losing someone dear to us. You may know examples of brethren or sisters who have been estranged from a family member but have gained a family in the meeting. Note that the list of things to be received includes persecutions.
4. Psalm 34:7. If you have time, look at 2 Kings 6:11-17, and get the young people to realise that we may often be in the same situation as the young man, unaware of the presence of God's angels. How far should we trust the Lord to deliver us? Consider the reaction of the Lord Jesus when he was tempted (Matthew 4:5-7). If we truly fear God, we won't test him by putting ourselves in stupid situations. He may not give us miraculous solutions but he will always help us to cope.

5. 2 Timothy 4:8. The crown of righteousness. Consider Paul's situation when he wrote this - about to be put to death for his faith. Note the condition - "those who long for his appearing". Do we really think things will be better when Jesus returns? Thinking of the problems of this world, for us and others, helps us to 'long for his appearing'.

Finally, look at the second excerpt from William Barclay's notes, and at the references he gives.

Relevance to our lives

The Bible is a book for today. The promises are not dry, academic things, but they should be real and vibrant. It is as though we had a ticket to the most important, most exciting, event we could imagine. What God asks of us is that he, and his word, should be most important in our lives, affecting everything else we do.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, you have given us so much and have promised us so much. We praise you and thank you for all this. Help us to understand these words you have written and then to live as your true children by faith. Amen

Other suggestions for activities

1. The young people might like to follow up this lesson by asking members of the ecclesia, or their family, which personal promise in the scriptures means most to them.
2. They could make a list of promises that would help them in times of doubt or difficulty.