

TEXT Isaiah 35:3-4; John 13:34,35; 15:12-17

SUPPLEMENTAL SCRIPTURES Ecclesiastes 4:9,10; Galatians 6:1,2

OBJECTIVE The students will be able to explain that one of the responsibilities of a follower of Christ is to have compassion and a caring concern for those who are spiritually weak.

KEY VERSE FOR ANSWER We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. — Romans 15:1

KEY VERSE FOR SEARCH Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. — 2 Corinthians 1:24

**ANSWER
TITLE:** **Someone to Care**
**SEARCH
TITLE:** **Encouraging the
Spiritually Weak**

REFERENCE INFORMATION

Clarification of needs, encouragement, prayer support, Biblical counsel, and understanding are valuable gifts that we can offer to the spiritually weak, but we must undertake these efforts by and through the direction of the Holy Spirit. We must consciously depend on God and respond to the person with Christlike love, as well as approaching the problem from a Biblical standpoint.

The first step in helping one in need is to be available: to give a person our physical presence and our attention.

Jesus continually made Himself available to people. A critical component in helping is listening, and effective listening means showing respect for the other person's feelings. Immediately jumping in with solutions—thus ignoring what they say—shows a lack of respect. When we have truly listened, then we have earned the right to be part of the third step: the process of solution. For real healing to take place, we must focus attention on the necessity of considering and responding to the will of God.

YOUR OPENER

RESPONSES

1. As your students discuss this, a number of “warning signs” could be mentioned. For example, has the person’s smile disappeared? Is he missing meetings? Does he get uncomfortable when the things of God are discussed? Does he pray less than he used to? Has a desire for other things replaced the hunger for more of God? Some of these signs will only be noticeable if you know the person fairly intimately. As a rule, those are the ones who will be the most responsive to your counsel.

2. To begin with, your students should clearly recognize the difference between a negative approach (“I sure haven’t seen you very much in church lately!”), to a positive approach (“It’s great to see you!”). Your students should realize that they need to be led by the Spirit of God. Through diligent prayer God can show them where, when, and how to expend their efforts. Refer to 1 Corinthians 9:26 to bring out that we want to run with certainty, not as one that “beateth the air” or strives ineffectively. It helps to put ourselves in the place of the spiritually weak, then pray and help them just as we would like to be helped. “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Caution your students regarding the danger of assuming authority or attempting to deal with situations that should be handled by the ministry.

3. Your students should be able to offer a number of ways that we can reach out to those who have a spiritual need. Their thoughts may include the following: offering verbal support or encouragement, relating what has worked well in your own experience, stressing the importance of daily prayer and meditation in the Word, talking about the great things the Lord has done for you and others, encouraging the person in need to call or look for you if they have a problem or question, reading the Bible together, praying with them, setting a good example of a positive and hopeful attitude by your own life, and just being a friend!

4. A Christian is going to show love, concern, friendship, and compassion for all. See Galatians 6:10. However, it doesn’t take long to discern when a person is truly hungry for spiritual encouragement. When we see that hunger, we should be quick to step in with support and do all we can to help that person grow spiritually. Ask your students to mention some of the ways we can identify the spiritually hungry. Possible answers: one who has a longing for the truth and is eager to grow in grace, one whose priorities are things which are focused on the Lord, one who lingers at the altars of prayer, one who asks honest questions about spiritual subjects or is constantly searching the Scriptures for answers.

Encouraging the Spiritually Weak

TEXT: Isaiah 35:3-4; John 13:34,35; 15:12-17

SUPPLEMENTAL SCRIPTURES: Ecclesiastes 4:9,10; Galatians 6:1,2

KEY VERSE: Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. — 2 Corinthians 1:24

The relationship between Christ and the true believer provides the basis for a worthwhile and fulfilling life. The one who is at peace with God is at peace with himself. An extension of that inward contentment is evidenced in the caring concern the Christian shows to those who suffer from spiritual weakness and discouragement. Admonitions to encourage one another, build each other up, and inspire each other to love and good works are woven all through the Word of God. One of the plainest expressions of love in the Scriptures is that of sharing with others. Some of the most valuable things we can share are our time, talents, and energies in building up those in the Body of Christ who particularly need spiritual support or encouragement.

1. We need to develop our power of spiritual observation and discernment in order to see areas where we can be used to encourage someone. What are indications that a person may be spiritually weak?

2. When we observe that a brother or sister is having spiritual difficulties, what is our responsibility in the matter? Doing nothing is not the answer. How can we best approach him in an encouraging manner, and avoid the risk of offending or alienating him?

3. The first two verses of our text in Isaiah list three things that we should do for the weak. How would you translate these instructions into some specific ways we should reach out to the spiritually weak?

4. There is a distinct difference between the spiritually weak person who is finding fault with holiness, the church, Christian people, etc., and the person who is simply ignorant of the deeper truths of the Gospel. How are we, as mature Christians, to identify and minister to their needs?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

5. Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would dwell in them. The Greek word *parakletos*, or “helper,” was used to describe the Holy Spirit. That word in its literal sense means “one called alongside.” How can the Holy Spirit’s role in our lives be a pattern for our influence in other people’s lives?

6. There is a danger in neglecting our duties as Christians. Refer to Ezekiel 34:10 and Matthew 25:44-46. How might these verses apply to us?

7. Our greatest example of servanthood was Jesus, who was the essence of compassion. In Philippians 2:7, we read that He took on Himself the form of a servant. Though many of the miracles Jesus did while on earth related to helping those in physical distress, He also ministered to people with spiritual needs. In both the Old and New Testaments, we read of God’s encouragement to those in need. Describe how God encouraged:

- Abram — Genesis 15:1-6
- Gideon — Judges 6:11-23
- David — II Samuel 7:8-16
- Palsied man — Matthew 9:2
- The disciples — Matthew 14:25-27

8. In reading John 13:34,35, we see that the Lord gave a new commandment. Explain what this commandment was, and how it relates to us as we attempt to strengthen the spiritually weak.

9. Our text in John 15 reiterates the commandment discussed in the previous question, but this time with an added depth to it. Explain verse 13 in your own words, and describe how we can fulfill it in our day.

10. Of all the promises and assurances you know in the Bible, which has been the most encouraging to you in a time of weakness?

5. Your students’ thoughts may bring out that the Holy Spirit is always faithful. He is there when we need Him, He functions as a Guide and Teacher, He brings comfort in times of distress and sorrow, He brings to our remembrance things of God that we ought to know, He glorifies Jesus, etc. These attributes should all be shown as we endeavor to help others.

6. Ezekiel 34:10 reveals to us that God removed the responsibilities of the shepherd. Matthew 25:44-46 shows that those who neglected their Christian duties were cast into everlasting punishment. The discussion resulting from these verses should bring out that if we neglect our Christian duties we not only may lose the blessing that comes from doing right, but we could even lose our salvation by ignoring one of the commands of God’s Word.

7. God appeared to Abram in a vision and made him a promise of a son. He promised Gideon His divine presence and victory over the enemy. David received God’s assurance that his son would build a house for God’s honor, and his throne would be established forever. Jesus told the palsied man to be of good cheer, and forgave his sins. Jesus’ disciples were afraid when they were in the midst of a storm, but were reassured when they saw Him walking to them on the water. Using these examples can reassure your students that God is always present to offer encouragement in times of need, and that we should be quick to extend this encouragement to others by being a servant to those in need. See 1 Corinthians 9:19.

8. The commandment was that we love each other as Jesus loves us. Your students should recognize that if we have godly love for our brethren who are in need of spiritual strengthening, we will be truly and deeply concerned about their well-being and anxious to do anything we can to edify and encourage them. Our attempts will be focused on building them up, and we will be prayerful and sincere in any approach to them. We will be careful that our words and actions are positive.

9. Your students should conclude that this verse means that we should be willing to do whatever the Lord asks of us. Our commitment should be such that we would go to any length in order to fulfill whatever the Lord would have us do to win souls for Christ. We are to deny ourselves, and offer our time and efforts in serving others who have a need.

10. Use your students’ responses to this question to wrap up your lesson, bringing out that the encouragement God has given us should be extended to others.

YOUR WRAP-UP

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

When problems come, people who do not know God often feel totally alone. Many feel they don't have anyone to encourage them or help them in bearing their burdens. Is it possible for a Christian to feel the same way when going through a trial? Explain.

How should we pray when we are praying near someone at the altar who appears to have a spiritual need?

How can repeating negative comments about a person affect that person's decision to "hold on to" or "give up" their salvation?

Why is it so important to visit people who are unable to attend church?

If you could see the Christian followers the way Jesus saw them from the cross, what do you think you would see? How do you think Jesus felt about these people? How does He feel today when Christians are hurting? are scared? are alone?

When a Christian friend confides in you about a struggle he is having, what should you do?

When should you refer a person to a minister for instruction?

Is it wise to ask advice of your parents?

Why do you think Mark, in our ANSWER story, felt so strongly that he must help Nikki?

THINGS TO DO

Print out a copy of the following sentence for each of your students. (Make sure there is plenty of space for their answers.)

"If I were sad, confused, or discouraged I would like a friend to . . ."

Ask your students to write out different ways they would want to be treated, and then encourage them to use those methods when dealing with others.

Ask your students what they would do to help a friend who has, perhaps, had a situation come into his life that has made him draw back from the usual routine of his spiritual walk. Should they just ignore it and hope everything will come out right by itself? Or, maybe, they might choose to do any of the following for that friend:

- Call him on the phone.
- Send him a card or letter.
- Visit him in person.
- Invite him on an outing.

There are some fruits and vegetables that grow fine all by themselves—all they need are water and sunshine. Yet, there are others which require some sort of support. If

possible, show your students some bean poles and string that are used when planting string beans. Also, show them some stakes which are used to support tomato plants. For the very best results, these vegetables need this type of support in order to survive and produce food for us. If we neglect to provide this very important support we can only expect a crop failure. Relate this to our being supportive of our Christian brothers and sisters. We want to help present the Lord with a bountiful harvest of souls, not a garden full of weeds.

Request answers to these questions from your class: Did you ever hear a grinding noise coming from some appliance in your home?

Have you ever been driving down the street in your car when suddenly you detected a strange rattle or bumping sound?


What are your first thoughts when you see that the gas gauge in the car is on empty?

If you ask your students why their proper reaction to any of these indicators is so important, they will probably tell you that if they don't react the problem will become worse. Ask them to help you compare these reactions to any spiritual weakness that a Christian brother or sister may have. We must be just as conscious of the fact that if the person isn't helped at the first sign of his problem, the problem will only become worse. With God's help and love we can become a part of the solution.

Answers for ANSWER

A Helping Hand

The Bible text for this lesson tells us that we should try to help our friends if they are weak spiritually. There are many ways we can help to build them up. Some of the main words of the text are listed below. Find them in the puzzle and circle each one.



S	T	R	O	N	G	A	H	W	E	N	I	V	S
J	R	I	W	O	F	P	S	D	A	R	K	D	Y
K	A	Q	P	E	J	C	H	O	S	E	N	I	D
R	E	S	M	E	A	Z	E	D	M	E	F	S	Q
U	H	L	V	U	G	K	S	G	I	D	L	C	C
C	B	O	T	P	B	L	I	R	S	Y	X	I	C
X	L	E	G	M	T	V	E	Y	N	O	H	P	T
F	O	J	S	R	E	O	Y	R	H	U	C	L	D
A	L	Z	N	E	E	G	W	I	U	A	T	E	I
T	C	A	G	H	R	A	E	H	N	I	M	S	M
H	M	E	K	T	N	I	T	A	R	D	T	B	E
E	W	L	U	O	D	J	V	E	N	L	F	J	V
B	A	G	P	N	Q	C	D	K	R	H	E	S	A
S	E	R	V	A	N	T	V	E	F	I	L	B	S

NEW

YOU

GIVE

LIFE

LOVE

NAME

SAVE

WEAR

FRUIT

HEART

CHOSEN

FATHER

STRONG

ANOTHER

FRIENDS

GREATER

SERVANT

DISCIPLES