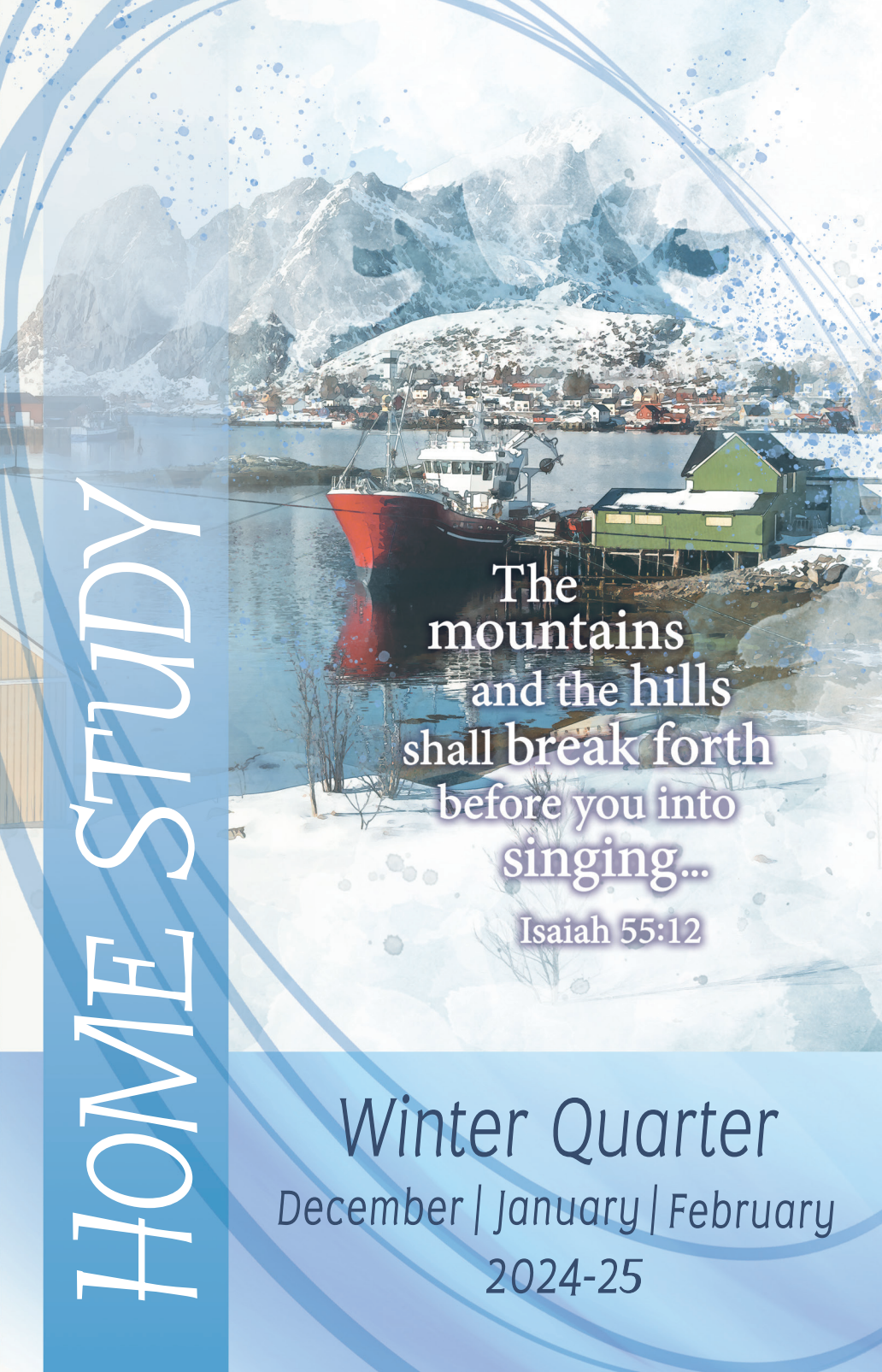


HOME STUDY



The
mountains
and the hills
shall break forth
before you into
singing...

Isaiah 55:12

Winter Quarter

December | January | February

2024-25

Home Study

WINTER QUARTER

December 2024, January, February 2025

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Editor in Chief: James M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Managing Editor: Michelle Birtasevic

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The Greatest is Love

DON RUFF

The Scriptures tell us that the Lord of all the universe is love. Our Heavenly Father is love perfected. Not only does the Bible tell us about God's love, but we can see His love from others' personal experiences. We and multitudes of other people have experienced His life-changing love. His actions have spoken louder than words. This quarter's lessons focus on the Lord's great love shown through actions.

His love in action included choosing a people to bring a great blessing to His fallen creation. Lesson 1 gives a message of hope to a world weary of struggling with sin. Through His prophet, God speaks tender words of comfort and forgiveness and foretells a special messenger who would come to prepare the way for Jesus Christ to bring our salvation. The prophecy about that messenger would be fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist.

All of creation suffers under the burden of sin and the punishment of death that it brings. Lesson 2 focuses on the prophecy of the Suffering Servant who would come and take the punishment for all our sins. God's action plan of love would lay on Him the suffering that we all deserve for our wrongdoing. His sacrifice would bring many souls to glory. Praise and honor will be given to the One worthy to receive it for such an amazing display of love.

God uses a young woman to bring about His prophecy and plan to save

us from sin and death. Lesson 3 is a study covering the affirmation of God's plan of action to send the Messiah into the world as fully God and fully human. Mary's prayer of praise about God's mercy and might is a beautiful song. All who trust in Christ as Lord and Savior can rejoice with her and glorify His name.

Lesson 4 is from Matthew 1. Jesus Christ, our Savior, was born to a virgin. God in human flesh came to earth as a baby who would grow, live a perfect and sinless life, and die for our salvation. God's love in action plan included a willing couple, who would care for our Savior before He began ministering to the world.

The first unit closes with a lesson about the Christ Child being taken to the temple for the preparation of His life of ministry. Two devout servants of God lifted praise to Him for the salvation He had prepared for all the nations of the world.

Unit 2 continues the message of love in action, focusing on acts of love shown by Jesus. The Lord's greatest demonstration of love came to the world through Jesus the Son.

Lesson 6 concentrates on how Jesus had come to call sinners to repentance. He acted on His love for humankind by making direct contact and creating friendships with those who were socially despised and rejected. His mission of love brought redemption and salvation to those outcasts.

Jesus' mission to seek and save the

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lost is exemplified through Zacchaeus's conversion in lesson 7. Jesus put His love in action by seeking out a man and his family who so desperately needed Him.

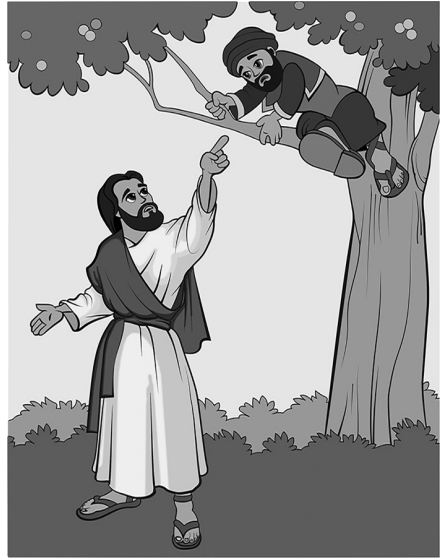
Acts of love toward others do not always receive thanks in return. After such a lack of appreciation and reciprocation, a typical human reaction would be to withhold acts of love in the future. Thankfully, Jesus is not like that. Lesson 8 covers how Jesus demonstrated His love through the action of healing ten men of a terribly debilitating and culturally isolating disease. Only one came back to praise and honor Jesus. The other nine did not return to thank Him for His act of love.

True love keeps no record of wrongs. Never has that been as true as with Jesus. When Jesus was arrested and taken away, Peter not only kept his distance from Jesus, he also denied knowing Him. Lesson 9 focuses on how Jesus lovingly forgave and restored their relationship, preparing Peter for godly and faithful service to advance the kingdom of God.

Sometimes acting out of love seems to cause problems. There will often be others who question the integrity and the reasons for loving actions. Some people will criticize out of jealousy those who do good things for others. Those reactions are part of lesson 10. Jesus was met with strong opposition and criticism after He lovingly healed a man of his blindness. The antagonism Jesus encountered did not stop Him from doing more acts of love.

Because God is love, and Jesus has showered His followers with great love, grace, and mercy, they will reflect the Lord's love in their own lives. Nonbelievers will be able to identify Christians—by their love for others. Unit 3 is titled "Acts of Love by Christ's Followers."

Lesson 11 captures how the members of the early church united and



fellowshipped together. Anyone who had a physical need was helped by others. The love and generosity they showed toward each other brought more people to the Lord. The church grew numerically, but more importantly, it grew spiritually.

Lesson 12 covers the story of Lydia, who converted to Christianity while Paul was in Philippi. She heard the gospel, believed, and was baptized. Without hesitation, she began to show others God's love in her.

Christian friendship and service are the themes of lesson 13. While on a missionary journey, Paul met two new friends, who joined him on his journey. The love they shared working and serving together was evident as they taught others about Jesus the Messiah.

This quarter shows us God's perfect expression of love. A life in Christ is one that loves and serves others. Jesus is our standard. He modeled the commands to love and serve one another. Love is at the heart of everything Jesus does, and it should be the same for every Christian.

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

ISA. 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these *things*, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that *he* is strong in power; not one faileth.

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength.

30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.

NOTES

Comfort for God's People

Lesson Text: Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-26, 29-31

Related Scriptures: Leviticus 26:40-45; I Chronicles 16:23-33;
Lamentations 1:1-22; Matthew 3:1-8

TIME: about 700-695 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

Lesson Exposition

God presents Himself in Scripture as the God of all comfort. Suffering abounds in this world, but the Lord is near to the brokenhearted. He stands ready to strengthen and uplift us in our time of sorrow.

We can think of at least three groups of people who have gained consolation from the message of comfort that we consider in this lesson.

First, it encouraged the faithful in Isaiah's day as they watched their nation decay morally and spiritually. It assured them that what appeared to be the end was not really the end; their nation still had a glorious future, and its fulfillment was assured by the very words of God.

Second, Isaiah's message gave hope to the people of Judah more than a century later as they lived in exile in Babylon far from their homeland and, later, as they returned home and began to rebuild. It assured them that their suffering actually had a purpose in God's great plan. The chastening would not continue forever but only until its purpose was accomplished.

Finally, these words have provided comfort for the people of God ever since. They speak to us today with the

message that God is a compassionate Father to His children. He is ever more ready to forgive and restore than to punish and chastise.

REDEMPTION WILL COME— Isa. 40:1-5

Consolation for God's people (Isa. 40:1-2). Isaiah prophesied some two hundred years after the kingdom of Israel was divided. The northern kingdom had been conquered and its people taken captive by the Assyrians. The southern kingdom, Judah, was on a path of spiritual and moral decay much like what the north had followed—although this course was slowed by periods of renewal under God-fearing kings. The end eventually would arrive for Judah, and Isaiah gave an early warning of what was to come.

Repetition makes for emphasis in the language of the Old Testament, and the invitation to be comforted is repeated (vs. 1). God's compassion is expressed all the more clearly because of that repetition.

Notice also that the appeal is intensely personal. Although the people had sinned, God still called them His people and identified Himself as their