

Teen Devotion

Year C - Advent 3

When the LORD Comes Near



One truth shared: There are times when it seems as if the enemies of God are getting away with it. There are times when the enemies of the Lord are our enemies too. When the Lord comes near, we will be vindicated, and his enemies will be thrown down.

Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Defeat

Trauma and abuse can be absolutely debilitating. After it happens, many people lose purpose, hope, and a sense of safety.

A group of scientists once carried out a very sad and provocative experiment on dogs. They wanted to know how trauma impacted dogs. So, they planned and executed a scientific study. In the study, the first group of dogs were put in cages. Throughout the day, these cages were electrified repeatedly while the doors to the cages were locked. At first, the dogs tried to get out of the cages, but after a while these poor traumatized dogs just laid down and endured the painful shocks over and over again. Horrible, isn't it? This was phase one of the study.

In phase two of the study, they opened the cage doors of the traumatized dogs and a second group of dogs who had not been previously shocked. Then, they shocked all of the dogs. The group of dogs who had never been shocked before simply walked right out of the electrified cages. But not the traumatized dogs. Even with their doors wide open, they just laid in their electrified cages. They had come to consider themselves as nothing more than victims, like sheep marked for slaughter. This was now their life. Horrible to think, isn't it?

Is this really who we are? Are we just sheep marked for the slaughter? Is laying down the only thing we can do in the face of abuse and trauma we have experienced? Are we the sum total of what has happened to us?

That's not what our God says about us. That is not at all what our God has done for us. Our God is a Mighty Warrior who saves and turns back those who want to and even do harm to us. Our God is a Mighty Warrior who takes great delight in us. The Lord is coming near this Christmas to be with us and defend us. He has taken upon himself our punishment. He has defeated our enemies! He promises to return someday and deliver us from those who harm us.

Don't be afraid and don't hang your head in defeat! We are not traumatized dogs; we are "more than conquerors through him who loved us" and "nothing can separate us from his love" (cf. Romans 8:35-39).

Prayer: O Mighty Warrior, when I lay down because I feel that there is nothing else I can do, strengthen me by your Spirit. I am not a traumatized dog. I am not a victim. I am more than a conqueror. I am your child. So, strengthen me for this life. Amen.

Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

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Note: This study could be potentially difficult for some students since it may trigger previous traumas or pains. The facilitator will want to be attentive to the emotions of the participants to create a safe environment. The goal of this study is to help students see themselves as conquerors not as victims. They are safe in the Lord. The group will want to model this.

Defeat

Starting the Discussion: This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.

- Pick one adjective to describe your week. What happened that you picked that adjective?
- Pick on adjective to describe your life. Why did you pick that adjective?

Connecting: This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.

- Watch the linked video and discuss: How is our view of our life and someone else's view of our life different? Why is that? What important lessons do you learn from this?
<https://youtu.be/XpaOjMXyJGk>

Digging In: Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning or a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.

- How would you describe Paul's life after his conversion? Why would you describe it that way?
- When Paul was in prison, he still managed to be joyful. He even urged us to be joyful. Look at Philippians 4:4-7. What do you think his secret was?
- God's people were often victimized and oppressed by the nations around them. What hope would these words from Zephaniah have given them? What hope does it give to you? Look at Zephaniah 3:14-20.

Conclusion: Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps, circling back to the "connecting question" above.

- Because of who God is and because of who you are to him, what new adjectives does he want you to describe the new week and the life he's given you?
- What can you do in the coming week to remember this? Examples: Sticky note on bathroom mirror, new background on your phone.