Study Through the Bible

Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian

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Galatians

Why read this book?
People who care about nutrition often read the labels before buying packaged foods. Why? They're on the lookout for additives and ingredients that may be hazardous to their health. In a similar way, Galatians warns against mixing legalism and human works into the simple gospel. It describes artificial spiritual additives and their toxic effects. This book offers a spiritual health check—a clear explanation of what it means to be saved by faith.

Who wrote this book?
Paul, the apostle.

To whom was it written?
To Christians in Galatia, a Roman province in the central part of what is now called Turkey.

When was it written?
Probably around A.D. 48 to 53, less than 25 years after Jesus Christ's ministry on earth.

Why was it written?
To denounce and correct false teachings that had infiltrated the churches Paul and Barnabas had earlier established. False teachers insisted that Gentile Christians keep the ritual laws of the Jews. Paul, stinging from their personal attacks against him, also wrote to defend his integrity as an apostle and to reassert his love for the Galatians.

What to look for in Galatians:
Galatians will take you back to the basics—what the gospel is, how you receive it and how you can apply it in your daily life. Paul uses several techniques (his own conversion story, an illustration from the life of Abraham and even sarcasm) to persuade the Galatians to return to the pure gospel.

From the Quest Study Bible (Zondervan)
There are two ways to try to please God. One is by human effort in keeping a moral code. The other is by trusting in Jesus Christ for the gift of righteousness and in the Holy Spirit for the ability to do God’s will. Those who trust in themselves are under God’s curse, while those who trust in God are under his favor.

As Christians, we believe we are saved by faith alone. But we often live as though God accepts and loves us based on our obedience to a biblical moral code or performance of certain spiritual disciplines. This study calls believers to rely not on human effort to please God, but on Christ and the Holy Spirit for righteousness.

Scripture:
Galatians 3:1–14

Based on:
"The Essence," Series Builder by Craig Brian Larson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

A news article about the religious history of the Chicago area began with this paragraph about Zion, a small town north of the city: “Rev. John Alexander Dowie left little to chance a century ago, when the charismatic preacher founded the city of Zion as a carefully ordered religious utopia: He immediately outlawed sin.”

It was both a great idea and a foolish presumption. God had already outlawed sin from the beginning, of course, thereby proving that pure legalism can’t produce godly people. Rev. Dowie should have known that the law only confirms that we’re sinners.

We should make laws, but laws don’t change hearts. Only Christ can change hearts and form “law-abiding” spiritual citizens.

(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.com, Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Chicago Tribune, 9-22-00.)

Discussion starters:

[Q] Why don’t laws change behavior?

[Q] How have you seen legalism expressed?

[Q] What type of legalism do you fall into?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our Christian life begins—and should continue—with faith in Christ, not human effort.

Some try to live the Christian life by the principle of human effort rather than faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the special pitfall of those who take God seriously, those who are religious. We understand that we are saved by trusting in Christ, but we fall back into trusting ourselves.

For a Christian to revert back to trying to gain God’s approval by keeping a moral code would be like a person who wins a vacation cruise, but then insists on cleaning the deck every day to earn it. God blesses those who rely on him rather than on themselves.

Read Galatians 3:1–5.

[Q] Why does Paul call the Galatians foolish and bewitched?
How would you answer Paul’s question, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?”

What’s wrong with the following statement?

“I’m not Mother Teresa, but I’m not Charles Manson either.”

*(Boxer Mike Tyson, arguing unsuccessfully during his application for a boxing license from Nevada state officials; Reuters, 1-30-02.)*

Teaching point two: Abraham is the prime example of those who are blessed and justified through faith, not law keeping.

God delights in our faith. It glorifies him. There is an inherent blessing in faith. First there is the ultimate blessing of faith for salvation. Then there are the blessings that come when we believe all the promises of God.

Read Genesis 15:1–6. What was God’s promise to Abraham? Did any conditions come with the promise? What does it mean that Abraham believed God and that God credited it to him as righteousness?

*Leader’s Note:* Abraham lived before the Ten Commandments, but God spoke to him and he believed what God said. God saw his heart and declared him righteous.

Read Galatians 3:6–9. How do we become children of Abraham? How are those who have faith blessed through Abraham?

*Leader’s Note:* Many centuries later, Abraham’s offspring resulted in Jesus, whom we have faith in and are thus blessed.

Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us understand our helplessness in changing our own lives.

**Activity:** Give three people the following statements in writing. Ask them not to show them to anyone else, but to stand in a row and read their statements aloud, one at a time. Ask the rest of the group to vote on which one is the real Abraham. After the vote, ask for volunteers to explain their choice.

♦ My name is Abraham. I lived an exemplary life. I always obeyed God in every matter.

♦ My name is Abraham. I tried to do what is right, but I failed. I lied about my wife being my sister, and I slept with my wife’s maid to help fulfill God’s promise about an offspring.

♦ My name is Abraham. God rewarded me because of the amazing sacrifices I made. I was even willing to sacrifice my own son.

The middle one is the true Abraham. The first one is not true, because Abraham made many mistakes. The third one is not true, because God chose to bless him before Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac.
Teaching point three: Those who seek to be justified by keeping a moral code are under a curse.

Steve McVey, president of Grace Walk Ministries, says this:

Realize that you can’t keep your promises. That may seem like a strange first step toward the goal of keeping promises, but it’s true.

Consider this question: If we could keep our promises, wouldn’t we have done it by now? How many times have we made the same promises? Let’s face it; rededication to keep promises won’t work. If it did, we wouldn’t find it necessary to keep rededicating ourselves. Many of us have struggled with promise keeping for one reason: We have focused on our performance more than on Jesus Christ. We have tried to keep our promises, but the Bible teaches that effective Christian living doesn’t come by trying. It comes by trusting Christ to express his life through us. He is the only One who can successfully keep promises.

Before we can be effective promise keepers, we must become promise receivers. The Bible is clear about God’s promise: the One who has given us his life will be the One who lives it for us. Only Jesus Christ can effectively live the perfect life. He lives inside believers today and wants to reveal his perfect life through us.

(From MEN OF INTEGRITY, Vol. 1, no. 2.)

[Q] Read Deuteronomy 27:26, Deuteronomy 21:23, and Galatians 3:10–14, in that order. Why are we under a curse if we try to gain favor with God by observing the law? Who took the curse for us? What does it mean to live by faith?

[Q] Read Leviticus 18:5. Why would God ask us to do something he knew we couldn’t do?

Leader’s Note: The Law was meant to lead us to Christ by revealing God’s goodness and our sinfulness.

[Q] Read Habakkuk 2:4 and Ephesians 2:8–9. How do we become puffed up and have wrong desires if we rely on our righteousness instead of faith? What is God’s solution to this problem?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

“Only one person in the Bible receives a direct promise of heaven—a thief.”

—Philip Yancey, CHRISTIAN READER, Vol. 33, no. 4.

Richard L. Dunagin of Denton, Texas, writes:

At their school carnival, our kids won four free goldfish (lucky us!), so out I went Saturday morning to find an aquarium. The first few I priced ranged from $40 to $70. Then I spotted it right in the aisle: a discarded 10-gallon display tank, complete with gravel and filter for a mere five bucks. Sold! Of course, it was nasty dirty, but the savings made the two hours of clean up a breeze.
Those four new fish looked great in their new home, at least for the first day. But by Sunday one had died. Too bad, but three remained. Monday morning revealed a second casualty, and by Monday night a third goldfish had gone belly up. We called in an expert member of our church who has a 30-gallon tank. It didn’t take him long to discover the problem: I had washed the tank with soap, an absolute no-no. My uninformed efforts had destroyed the very lives I was trying to protect.

Sometimes in our zeal to clean up our own lives or the lives of others, we unfortunately use the “killer soaps” of legalism and moralism.

(From LEADERSHIP, Vol. 6, no. 3.)

**Q** With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most?

1) I try my best to live the way God wants me to, but I often fail.

2) I often fail, but I confess it and ask God for his power to live as he wants me to.

3) I’ve given up trying because it’s hopeless.

4) I have no trouble keeping God’s commandments.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

**Q** What is one area where you have relied on your own efforts for God’s acceptance? How can you surrender that area to God and live by faith?

**Q** Think of one person you know who struggles with trying to live the Christian life in his or her own power. Pray for an opportunity to talk to this person about what you learned in this lesson.

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon
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(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.com, Lee Eclov, Lake Forest, Illinois; source: Chicago Tribune, 9-22-00.)

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our Christian life begins—and should continue—with faith in Christ, not human effort.

Teaching point two: Abraham is the prime example of those who are blessed and justified through faith, not law keeping.

Teaching point three: Those who seek to be justified by keeping a moral code are under a curse.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most?

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Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 2

LEADER’S GUIDE

The Way to Spiritual Vitality

If your Christian life feels like duty and drudgery, here is the secret to a dynamic relationship with God.

Galatians 3:15–25 explores the purpose of the law in light of the promise of Christ. Paul explains that dependence on human effort can only distance a person from God. Faith in Christ and his promises brings us close to God and into full spiritual life. Christians today will experience the fullest riches of Christian vitality when they live by faith in Christ and all God’s promises, with obedience to the law of Christ flowing from that faith.

This study helps us discover the joy of living under Christ’s grace even when we fail to live up to the law.

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Galatians 3:15–25

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PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

Why do people try to relate to God based on human effort? Some are trying to assuage their guilt by good works. Some are well meaning but deceived. They have been taught the main tenet of human religion: that we must be good to gain God’s approval. Some trust in themselves more than they do in God. Some, in pride, want to earn and deserve salvation.

Paul’s overall purpose in Galatians is to refute the error of legalism being taught by Judaizers from Jerusalem. This form of legalism taught that to be saved a Christian needed not only to believe in Christ but also to keep the law of Moses. Paul’s purpose in this text is to teach that believers in Christ are not subject to the law of Moses because of the preeminence of God’s covenant with Abraham, a covenant based on faith in God’s promise.

Galatians 3:15–25 tells why faith in the promised “Seed,” not the keeping of the law of Moses, has always been the basis for a relationship with God.

Discussion starters:

[Q] What kind of religious tradition were you raised in? Were you taught that your relationship with God depended on human effort?

[Q] What’s wrong with believing in Christ, but also keeping the law of Moses?

[Q] Why are humans so attracted to rules?

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our inheritance in Christ depends on God’s promise, not on our keeping the law.

Mark Moring, editor of MEN OF INTEGRITY, writes:

It was late, and my young sons, Peter and Paul, had been in bed for at least an hour. My wife and I had just returned from our Bible study group, and I snuck into the boys’ room to say good night.

“Dad, can I have some ice cream?”

“No, Peter, it’s late, way past bedtime.”

“But Dad, you promised.”

He was right. Peter had asked for ice cream earlier in the day, but we didn’t have any. And I had said, “I’ll get some for you later, I promise.”
Dinner came and went. We cleaned up the kitchen; the boys picked up their toys. The sitter arrived. And my wife and I left for Bible study. I’d forgotten all about the ice cream. But Peter hadn’t. So, even though it was after 10 o’clock, I hopped in the car, drove to the convenience store, got a half-gallon, and hurried home.

Peter and I enjoyed that chocolate-vanilla swirl together. After all, I had a promise to keep.

(From MEN OF INTEGRITY, Vol. 1, no. 1.)

Read Galatians 3:15–18.

[Q] Have you ever had to break a human covenant (contract)? Was it difficult? Why?


[Q] According to Galatians 3:18, what does our inheritance depend on? What does that mean?

Teaching point two: The law was intended as a temporary revealer of sin until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ.

Robert C. Roberts writes:

There’s something comfortable about reducing Christianity to a list of do’s and don’ts, whether your list comes from mindless fundamentalism or mindless liberalism: you always know where you stand, and this helps reduce anxiety. Do’s-and-don’ts-ism has the advantage that you don’t need wisdom. You don’t have to think subtly or make hard choices. You don’t have to relate personally to a demanding and loving Lord.

(From The Reformed Journal, Feb. 1987; CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol. 31, no. 9.)


[Q] According to these verses, what was the purpose of the law?

[Q] Should we obey or ignore Old Testament law?

Leader’s Note: The law was never intended to take the place of faith. Instead it helped the Israelites understand what sin is. Until they understood sin, they were not able to understand God or their need of a savior. However, the Old Testament law shows us what God sees as important. We do not have to keep every law, but are called to an even higher standard—the spirit of the law, which is to love God and others (Matthew 22:37–40).

[Q] Who is the “Seed” in verse 19? Who are the angels and mediator in this verse?

Leader’s Note: The Seed is Christ. The Jews believed that angels gave the law to Moses, the mediator.
Teaching point three: What the law lacks the power to do—impart righteousness and life—the promise can do through faith in Christ.

Vic Pentz recounted this story in a sermon:

About a year and a half ago, I bought a new navy blazer at Nordstrom. It was one of those cases you may have gone through where you buy an item of clothing and the more you wear it, the more you realize you don’t like it. My blazer wasn’t the right color, and to make matters worse, it attracted lint like it was going out of style. After wearing it pretty regularly for six months or so, I stuck it in my closet and didn’t wear it for a long time.

Tucked away in the back of my mind all the while was that famous Nordstrom unconditional-return policy. I thought, I’ve had this thing for a year and a half. I’ve worn it lots of times, and there’s just no way they’re going to take it back.

About two weeks ago I decided I had nothing to lose. I pulled the blazer out, threw a lot of lint on it to make it look bad, and took it down to Nordstrom’s men’s department. I walked in, and immediately I felt nervous. I felt like I was about to pull a scam of some sort, but I played it straight. I walked right up to the first salesman I saw and gave this little prepared speech. I said, “I am about to put your famous unconditional-return policy to its ultimate test. I have here a blazer. I’ve worn it lots. I’ve had it for a year and a half. I don’t like it. It’s the wrong color, and it attracts lint like it’s going out of style. But I want to return this blazer for another blazer that I like.” Then I stood there.

I couldn’t believe it. This guy with a big handlebar mustache just looked at me and shook his head. He said, “For heaven’s sake, what took you so long? Let’s go find you a blazer.” Ten minutes later I walked out with another blazer that was marked seventy-five dollars more than I paid for the one that I brought in. It was perfect for me. Didn’t cost me a penny.

God is like Nordstrom. God makes all sorts of outlandish promises that we cannot bring ourselves to believe. When we get up enough courage or we’re desperate enough, we finally take him at his word. He looks at us and shakes his head. “For heaven’s sake,” he says, “what took you so long?”

(From “A Twinge of Nostalgia,” PREACHING TODAY, Tape No. 88.)

Read Galatians 3:21–22.

[Q] How is the whole world a prisoner to sin?

[Q] Why can the law never impart life?

[Q] How do you view the keeping of the Old Testament law?

1. I need rules; otherwise I don’t know how to behave.
2. Rules make me feel like breaking them more than keeping them.
3. I need some rules, but only a few.
4. Without rules my life would be chaos.
Discuss as a group how each member feels toward rules. When can rules be beneficial? When are they harmful?

**Teaching point four: Faith in God’s promises energizes obedience and brings the empowering of the Holy Spirit.**

Some movements still teach that to be fully accepted by God, Christians must keep parts of the Old Testament law of Moses, such as certain dietary laws and Sabbath-keeping.

Many Christians who believe they are saved by faith alone actually live as though God accepts them and loves them based on their obedience to a biblical moral code, such as the Ten Commandments, or their performance of spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, tithing, and service. Galatians 3:15–25 teaches the priority in the sight of God of faith in his promises. Christian spirituality is based on faith in God's promises, which precedes and energizes obedience to the law of Christ.

Many sincere Christians lack spiritual vitality. Obedience to Christ has become drudgery. Often this spiritual lethargy results from an effort to obey the law of Christ without the underpinnings of faith in God’s promises and a dependence on the Holy Spirit. When faith is weak, obedience falters. When we rely on our own strength, obedience fails. Faith in God’s promises energizes obedience and brings the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Read Galatians 3:23–25.

**Q** How can we be held prisoners by the law?

**Q** How does the law lead us to Christ?

**Optional Activity**

**Purpose:** To help us realize that the law can never make us good.

**Activity:** Provide everyone in the group a section of the newspaper that covers crime. Ask them to look for a story of someone who broke the law. Give each person the chance to share a brief summary of the story they found, and ask them:

1. What law was broken in this crime?
2. Do you think the person in this story knew he/she was breaking the law?
3. Why do you think the law failed to stop their crime?
4. What hope is there for them now?

When everyone who wants to has shared, ask them how this relates to our efforts to please God by our deeds and what our approach should be instead.

**PART 3**

**Apply Your Findings**

Pastor Ron Lee Davis shared this illustration:
In the second book of *The Chronicles of Narnia, Prince Caspian*, Lucy enters Narnia again, and she hasn’t seen Aslan, this lion figure who represents Christ, in a long, long time, and so they have a wonderful reunion. Lucy says to Aslan, “Aslan, you’re bigger now.”

Aslan says, “Lucy, that’s because you are older. You see, Lucy, every year that you grow, you will find me bigger.” For many of us, every year we grow, we find him bigger in his grace and in his goodness and in his faithfulness and in those promises that he has given us upon which we can depend all the days of our lives.

*(From “Rejoicing in Our Suffering,” PREACHING TODAY, Tape No. 74.)*

**[Q]** How do we practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible reading, church attendance, service, etc., without becoming burdened by them?

**[Q]** How does faith in God’s promises energize our obedience to Christ?

**Leader’s Note:** If we are acting out of duty rather than affection for God and his promises, we will become weary.

**[Q]** How can the Holy Spirit help us to remain vital in our walk with God?

**Leader’s Note:** When we are at the end of our strength, we need to trust God to breathe new life into us through the power of his Holy Spirit.

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon
Galatians: The Essence of Being a Christian - Study 2

PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

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Teaching point one: Our inheritance in Christ depends on God’s promise, not on our keeping the law.

Teaching point two: The law was intended as a temporary revealer of sin until the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ.

Teaching point three: What the law lacks the power to do—impart righteousness and life—the promise can do through faith in Christ.

[Q] How do you view the keeping of the Old Testament law?

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(From “Rejoicing in Our Suffering,” PREACHING TODAY, Tape No. 74.)

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon
A Vibrant Hope for the Future

Do you have anything to look forward to? Does living in the kingdom of God after you die sound boring? Good News! Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams! When we unite with Christ, he qualifies us for the full rights of God’s children.

This study describes the vast implications of being a son or daughter of God. In Christ, the heir of Abraham, we too become heirs of Abraham and inherit aspects of the promises given to Abraham. We transfer from the guardianship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Best of all, we are heirs of God himself; we actually have the full inheritance rights of being God’s child. God wants us to live not like slaves but like his children.

Scripture:
Galatians 3:26–4:7

Based on:
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PART 1
Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant’s Guide included at the end of this study.

The movie *Princess Diaries* tells the story of Amelia Thermopolis, an average, awkward teen whose estranged grandmother (Julie Andrews) comes to America to give Amelia the biggest news of her life.

Amelia visits her grandmother at her opulent mansion in San Francisco. A butler leads Amelia to the grand living room, where she stands amazed as several servants bustle about. Suddenly, all the servants stand at attention as Amelia’s grandmother enters the room. The contrast between Amelia and her refined grandmother is painfully apparent. After some small talk, Amelia, feeling uncomfortable, asks her grandmother, “What is it you want to tell me?”

Her grandmother answers, “Something, I believe, that will have a very big impact on your life.” They walk outside to talk, and her grandmother begins to explain. “Amelia, have you ever heard of Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi?”

“No,” Amelia responds. Her grandmother tells Amelia he was the crown prince of Genovia.

Amelia is as baffled as she is indifferent and shrugs her shoulders. “What about him?” she asks.

Her grandmother says, “Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi was also your father.”

Thinking her grandmother is only joking, she laughs, rolls her eyes in disbelief, and says, “If he was a prince, that would make me a—”

“Exactly,” says her grandmother, “a princess. You see, you are not just Amelia Thermopolis. You are Amelia Mignonette Thermopolis Renaldi, the princess of Genovia.”

Amelia can hardly speak as this new revelation sinks in. “Me...a...a...a princess?”

Discussion starters:

**[Q]** Amelia changed the way she viewed herself when she discovered she was a princess. How does the way you view yourself and your future affect how you live? In what ways does being a child of the King change how you view yourself?

**[Q]** Name some things most people look forward to in life. What do you look forward to?

PART 2
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christ qualifies you to inherit Abraham’s promises.

Paul says in Ephesians 1:18, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” It is important for us to know the hope to which God has called us, and Paul
connects this hope with our inheritance. Our hope will increase as we understand the inheritance rights and privileges that come with being a child of God.

Bernie May tells the story of an airline captain who flies overseas routes and also runs a small filling station near his home. Between trips to Europe and the Middle East, he gets a kick out of changing plugs and points and talking to the folks while pumping gas.

One Saturday morning, dressed in his greasy overalls, he walked down to the local hardware store to pick up a wrench. “What’s new?” the storeowner asked as he rang up the purchase. “Ah, I’m thinking of taking the Cairo run this month,” the captain said. “I enjoy flying to London and Frankfurt, but I think the change of pace will do me good.” He paid for the wrench and left.

Another customer, curious, asked, “Who’s the world traveler?” Rolling his eyes, the storeowner nodded toward the departing pump jockey. “Some nut who runs the gas station down the street. Thinks he’s an airline pilot!” Both men got a good laugh out of that one.

Like that airline pilot, we are more than meets the eye.

(From “Under His Wing,” LEADERSHIP, Vol. 4, no. 3.)


[Q] What does it mean that we are sons of God? According to verse 26, how did we become sons of God?

Leader’s Notes: For Paul’s analogy to make sense at that time, he used the word “sons,” not “sons and daughters,” because in that culture only the sons inherited what belonged to the father. So in that sense, we all become sons.

[Q] Did Christ erase all ethnic, economic, and gender distinctions? (v. 28) Why or why not? What does this have to do with the point Paul is making?

Leader’s Note: This verse helps us see that we all come to Christ in the same way.

Teaching point two: Christ redeems you from the guardianship of the law.

What difference does attitude make in our performance? Imagine a teenager has the job of painting the house and sees it as drudgery, finishing it as quickly as possible with little interest in the outcome. His parent inspects the job to see if he did it correctly, then makes him repeat any places he missed. When the child is an adult, he inherits the house. By this time it needs painting again, but he is delighted to work on it because he knows it will increase his property value.

Read Galatians 4:1–5.

[Q] Compare our analogy of the teenager with the verses we just read. What difference does it make that in Christ we receive our full rights as sons?

[Q] What does it mean in verse 4 that “the time had fully come”?

Leader’s Notes: Jesus wasn’t early or late, but right on time. God brought him to earth when mankind would be ready to hear his message.
Optional Activity

**Purpose:** To help us realize that knowing the end result of something affects our attitude as we go through it.

**Activity:** Ask someone who doesn’t attend your study if they would be willing to receive a phone call during your study. Explain to them this exercise ahead of time. Ask for a volunteer to call that person during the study. It will work best if the volunteer does not know the person they are calling. Tell them to ask only the following questions and then to say goodbye and hang up.

1. How old are you?
2. What gender are you?
3. How long have you been coming to our church?
4. Have you ever been arrested for any kind of offense?
5. Do you get along well with others?

When they’ve completed the call, ask them how they felt when they were asking the questions (probably awkward). Then ask if it would have helped if they’d known that the person they were talking to was volunteering to work in the nursery (for most people that would help because they would understand why they were asking the questions). Ask the group how this applies to the fact that we are heirs of Jesus Christ.

**Teaching point three: Christ gives you the full rights of an heir of God the Father.**

*Uncorked* is a movie about an ambitious, self-absorbed man’s futile search for wealth. Ross (played by Rufus Sewell) is determined to sell a priceless family wine collection to buy a local manganese mine, which he hopes will earn him great wealth. His eccentric Uncle Cullen (played by Nigel Hawthorne) is unimpressed by his nephew’s materialism.

Ross broods about how to get his brother and uncle to sign over the estate to him. When that fails, he inveigles his girlfriend in an unseemly plan to murder his Uncle Cullen. But in his moment of madness he restrains himself and is remorseful about his self-centeredness. While he apologizes to his uncle, he indicates he will be finding a place of his own.

Cullen acknowledges his nephew’s contrition and smiles. “Well, let me tell you something,” Cullen says. “You already have a place of your own. You already own Sachell Farm.”

Unwilling to believe what he is hearing, Ross runs to the family safe. Upon opening it he discovers the deed to the estate has had his name on it all along. Ross wonders aloud if this all could be true.

Cullen calls attention to a blue folder that is also in the safe. His nephew looks into the folder and pulls out a key. With a flash of insight, Ross runs to the entrance to the mine. The key fits the lock. Amazingly the mine he has longed to own was already in the family. It was a birthright he could only accept as a gift, not earn or buy.

How did God send the Spirit of his Son into our hearts?

What does it mean that the Spirit calls out “Abba, Father”?

The following well-known people in the Bible gained a new identity because they became God’s heirs and followed a new calling. See if you can recognize them by these descriptions:

1. I own my own small business. On a lousy day, Jesus helped me improve my profits. I decided to follow him. Although I wanted to be loyal, I had trouble. In spite of that, God used me to establish his church.

2. Although I was my father’s favorite child, I never received a dime from him. I ended up going to a whole new country, wound up in prison, but eventually gained a high position in the government of that country.

3. I became a scholar of the Jewish faith and prided myself in my knowledge of Jewish law. Because of my loyalty to my faith, I made it my goal to wipe out a sect that was gaining popularity in Israel. Instead, I became one of the most ardent followers of that sect.

4. Even though I was an immigrant, I became a respected member of the ruling party of the country I lived in. However, when I came under suspicion of loyalty, I was given a death sentence that I miraculously survived. After that, God was freely worshiped in my country.

1) Peter: Jesus filled his nets with fish when he’d caught nothing. Although he denied Christ three times, God used him to plant the church. 2) Joseph: Sold into slavery in Egypt, falsely accused and thrown into prison, he eventually became second in command in Egypt. 3) Paul: Studied under one of the most respected Jewish rabbis and persecuted Christians. Converted and became the early church’s greatest evangelist. 4) Daniel: Taken into captivity, he rose to great power but was thrown to the lions when he prayed to God instead of worshiping only the king. Was delivered and continued to influence the country.

PART 3
Apply Your Findings

On September 2, 1945, the documents of surrender officially ending World War II were signed by the Japanese and designated representatives of allied nations. General Douglas MacArthur officiated the ceremony aboard the USS Missouri and was the last to sign on behalf of the United States.

MacArthur, flanked by his military colleagues, took his Parker fountain pen and simply signed his first name, “Douglas.” He then passed the pen to General Wainwright, who signed “Mac.” MacArthur then handed the pen to General Percival, who signed “Arthur.” This unusual procedure was MacArthur’s way of honoring the two United States generals who had suffered severe persecution as prisoners of war. They had persevered, and now they were allowed to share in the glory of victory.
In Romans 8:17 Paul describes the future of those who persevere in the spiritual battles we fight this side of heaven. He calls them joint-heirs. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ will also share in his glory.

(Illustration from PREACHINGTODAY.COM, submitted by Greg Asimakoupoulos, Naperville, Illinois.)

[Q] After doing this study, what do you think is our inheritance?

[Q] Why is it better than anything else the world has to offer?

[Q] What does it mean to share in Christ’s sufferings? His glory?

—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon
A Vibrant Hope for the Future

Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams.

Do you have anything to look forward to? Does living in the kingdom of God after you die sound boring? Good News! Your inheritance exceeds your wildest dreams! When we unite with Christ, he qualifies us for the full rights of God’s children.

This study describes the vast implications of being a son or daughter of God. In Christ, the heir of Abraham, we too become heirs of Abraham and inherit aspects of the promises given to Abraham. We transfer from the guardianship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Best of all, we are heirs of God himself; we actually have the full inheritance rights of being God’s child. God wants us to live not like slaves but like his children.

Scripture:
Galatians 3:26–4:7

Based on:
"The Essence," Series Builder by Craig Brian Larson, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS
PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

The movie *Princess Diaries* tells the story of Amelia Thermopolis, an average, awkward teen whose estranged grandmother (Julie Andrews) comes to America to give Amelia the biggest news of her life.

Amelia visits her grandmother at her opulent mansion in San Francisco. A butler leads Amelia to the grand living room, where she stands amazed as several servants bustle about. Suddenly, all the servants stand at attention as Amelia’s grandmother enters the room. The contrast between Amelia and her refined grandmother is painfully apparent. After some small talk, Amelia, feeling uncomfortable, asks her grandmother, “What is it you want to tell me?”

Her grandmother answers, “Something, I believe, that will have a very big impact on your life.” They walk outside to talk, and her grandmother begins to explain. “Amelia, have you ever heard of Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi?”

“No,” Amelia responds. Her grandmother tells Amelia he was the crown prince of Genovia.

Amelia is as baffled as she is indifferent and shrugs her shoulders. “What about him?” she asks.

Her grandmother says, “Eduard Cristof Philip Gerard Renaldi was also your father.”

Thinking her grandmother is only joking, she laughs, rolls her eyes in disbelief, and says, “If he was a prince, that would make me a—”

“Exactly,” says her grandmother, “a princess. You see, you are not just Amelia Thermopolis. You are Amelia Mignonette Thermopolis Renaldi, the princess of Genovia.”

Amelia can hardly speak as this new revelation sinks in. “Me...a...a...a princess?”

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Christ qualifies you to inherit Abraham’s promises.

Teaching point two: Christ redeems you from the guardianship of the law.

Teaching point three: Christ gives you the full rights of an heir of God the Father.
PART 3

Apply Your Findings

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—Study by Craig Brian Larson, with JoHannah Reardon
UNDERSTAND THE WORLD

For a trustworthy Christian perspective on current issues, trends, and news, turn to Christianity Today magazine. You’ll get reliable facts and views to help you make wise decisions in our ever-changing world.

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