

New Year's Lesson

New Beginnings

OVERVIEW

Background Bible Passage: Matthew 9:9-13

Key Verse: 1 John 1:9—"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

BEFORE CLASS

Preparation: *Your preparation will determine the direction your class will go.*

- Consider the high and low points of the past year: Would you change anything if you could? Would you make different decisions? What do you want God to do in your life in the new year?
- Consider the goodness of God's grace and how he allows new beginnings.
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Pray for each student by name.
- Use the Contact 1-2-3 system to the right to follow up on students who have recently missed on Sunday morning.
- Pray for each student by name.

CONTACT 1-2-3 SYSTEM

CONTACT 1--The first time a student is absent, give him a call.

CONTACT 2--Following the second absence, send him a postcard.

CONTACT 3-- The third week they are absent, pay him a visit.

THINK ABOUT IT: What does it say to a student when they miss multiple weeks in a row and are never contacted? It says, "It really doesn't matter if you're here or not." Small things communicate great messages. Let the three "small" things above communicate that you care and miss your students when they are absent.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Discussion Questions

- *What have you been doing on Christmas break?*
- *Are you looking forward to going back to school?*
- *What was the high point of this past year?*
- *What was the low point of the past year?*

- *If you could change anything about the past year, what would it be?*
- *If you could choose for anything to happen in the upcoming year, what would it be?*
- *Do you feel that you are closer to God now than you were a year ago? Why or why not?*

BIBLE LESSON

Turn to Matthew 9:9-13

[BIBLE SKILLS] While turning there, ASK:

- *What are the Gospels?* (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—where the life of Jesus is found.)
- *Since we just finished Christmas, here's a Christmas question: In which Gospels is the birth of Jesus told?* (In Matthew and Luke. Both Mark and John begin with Jesus just before He is baptized.)

Choose a volunteer to read—Read Matthew 9:9-13.

After reading the Scripture passage, ASK:

- *What was Matthew's reputation?* (He was a tax collector during a time when Israel was occupied by Roman authorities. The Romans believed “who's better to get money from a Jew than another Jew?” Therefore they used their own people to collect taxes. This meant that tax collectors were traitors. But to make matters worse, the Romans would tell the tax collectors how much money to collect. Anything they collected above that amount was theirs to keep, so they could charge whatever they wanted and the Roman Empire would back them up. Thus, tax collectors were also thieves. They were considered to be the worst and most unclean sinners. Religious leaders called them pariah-dogs (pariah meaning “outcast”) and would many times spit at them or not look at them as if they didn't even exist. Pharisees taught that God rejoiced when He threw a tax collected into hell.)

SAY: Matthew had a reputation on the basis of the job he held.

- *What do you think gives you your reputation?* (i.e., sports, intelligence, kindness, etc.)
 - *What kind of reputation did you have at your school this past year?*
 - *Are you happy with this reputation?*
- *How do you think Matthew felt when Jesus not only looked at him and spoke to him, which was more than any other religious leader would've done, but also called him to be a disciple and ate at his house?* (Eating with someone in that culture was a sign of friendship. This is one reason that the Pharisees were so upset that Jesus and his disciples had dined with them.)

- *Are there people in your life that might be glad if you spoke to them or offered to spend time with them? Do you know others who might be an outcast and be looking for a friend? Do you think your reputation would draw them into a closer walk with God?*
- *Jesus called Matthew to be a disciple. Are there people in your life that you can call to follow Christ as well—not only to share with them about how to be saved but also to help disciple them?*
- *What would stop you from leading a Bible study with a few friends to help them walk closer with Christ? Or eating lunch with them once a week and talking about what God is doing in your life? What might stop you this year from be a part of discipling someone else.*

Consider the following obstacles that stop Christians from helping other Christians grow:

- (1) You can't help others grow closer to Christ if you are not right with Him yourself—if you are not totally surrendered and desiring to follow Him in every area of your life.
- (2) You can't disciple someone to grow closer to Jesus if you are not growing closer to Jesus as well.
- (3) You can't share with others what God is doing in your life if you are not letting Him do anything in your life.
- (4) You can't challenge someone else to spend daily time with God, or to read their Bible, or witness, or tithe, or regularly attend church if you are not already doing these things.
- (5) You can't lead someone where you've never been. Someone who is not in love with Jesus will never produce others who are in love with Jesus.
- (6) Some people are just unwilling to take the time or energy to invest themselves in others.

- *What other reasons can you think of that might stop a Christian from helping other Christians grow closer to Christ?*

- *What are some ways you can help others grow closer to Christ this year?*

Here are some ideas:

- (1) Have a Bible study with some of your friends at your house or at lunch at school
- (2) Sit and talk one-on-one with another Christian at lunch once a week and share what God has been doing in your life.
- (3) Invite some friends to your house to watch the *Passion of Christ* movie and then talk about what Jesus means to you.
- (4) Find an accountability partner that you can encourage and with whom you can share.
- (5) Find someone who has similar interests as you and use those interests to create a way to reach and teach others about Jesus.

KEY VERSE

SAY: In the Bible story today Jesus gave Matthew a chance at a brand new start.

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- *What did Matthew have to do to take Jesus up on the chance at a new life? (He had to follow Him which meant leaving his old way of life.)*
- *What does a person have to do today to get a “new beginning” from Jesus? (He has to turn from his sins and commit himself totally to following Jesus.)*
- *Why do you believe this? Show me where the Bible says what a person has to do to have a “new beginning” in Christ? (Let your student give you some answers. Give them a moment to look up some verses. Then continue with the key verse for today.)*

Choose a volunteer to read—Read 1 John 1:9

- *What does a person have to do to be forgiven? (Confess his sins. This is more than just saying, “Oh, what I did was wrong. I’m sorry.” Confess means “to agree with.” In other words, when you confess your sins you are agreeing with God concerning His standards and true confession always requires a turning from the sin and a turning to God.)*
- *What does God do when a person confesses their sins? (He forgives them and cleanses them from all unrighteousness. Their sin is removed.)*

Activity: A Letter to Self

SAY: I am going to read another verse to you about the new beginning a person has in Christ but first **close your eyes**:

SAY: With your eyes closed, take a look inside your own heart. Are there things you’ve been doing this past year that you know don’t belong in the life of someone who is a follower of Christ? Have you treated people in a bad way? Have you had a bad attitude? Have you had a bad mouth? Have you entertained bad thoughts? Perhaps you have looked at things, watched things, listened to things that you know weren’t right. Are you living in a way that is totally pleasing to God? With your eyes closed listen to this verse:

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

(It would be best if you had this already pre-marked in your Bible.)

SAY: Now, with your eyes closed, perhaps today you need a new beginning. Perhaps today you need to confess your sins to God, ask for His forgiveness and turn from them to follow Him again. I’m going to give you a moment of silence to do this if you want to. Use this time to talk to God about your life and to be still before Him.

SAY: Now, with your eyes still closed, I want you to think about what you want God to do in your life this year. *(Give them a few quiet moments to do this.)*

SAY: You can open your eyes now. I'm going to give you a piece of paper and several minutes to write a letter to yourself expressing where you want to be in your relationship with Christ a year from now and listing any spiritual goals you might have. Take your time and then put it in an envelope and address it to yourself. These letters will be sent to you at the end of next December. Nobody will look at them. This is your letter to God and a reminder to yourself about where you want to be in your relationship with Him in one year's time.

(NOTE: Give the students several minutes to do this activity and check to make sure that they addressed the letter to themselves, including their full address. Thank you.)

WRAP IT UP

Prayer Time

Pray specifically for the new year and that your student will follow Christ always.

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

Prayer Requests

A Letter From You

INSTRUCTIONS:

Write below a letter to yourself expressing where you want to be in your relationship with Christ a year from now and listing any spiritual goals you might have. These letters will be mailed to you at the end of December next year.

Date:

Dear _____,

These are my Spiritual Goals for this year:

There if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17).