

Studies for families in Belonging, Becoming, and going Beyond

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UNLIKELY HEROES

"WHEN GOD SAYS 'JUMP'"
IUDGES 3:7-11

This Week's Core Competency

Hope – I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:19-20 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

On the one hand, hopelessness kindles helplessness, while on the other, hopefulness sparks courage. Othniel, the first major judge in Israel was a courageous character. He followed in the footsteps of his elder brother, Caleb, in that regard. Caleb, you will remember, was one of only two spies who brought back a "good" report after exploring the land of Canaan. Ten spies delivered the majority report, which left the crowd in an uproar: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there . . . We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are" (Nu 13:27-28, 31). Caleb silenced the upset gathering and delivered the minority report: "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it" (v. 30). Together, he and Joshua warned the people, who regretted that they had not died in Egypt and wanted to return, to not rebel against the Lord. "The land we passed through and

Othniel was willing to attempt difficult and dangerous tasks for God.

- Leon Wood

explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (14:7-9). Caleb was forty years old at the time.

Forty-five years later after entering the land, he declared: "So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said" (Jos 14:10-12). And he did (Jud 1:9-10, 20). When the time came to take Debir to the south of Hebron, Caleb offered Acsah, his daughter, in marriage to the man who, in lieu of the bride price, captured the city (Jud 1:12). Othniel gladly accepted his older brother's generous offer.

Regarding Othniel's courage then, one author writes: "Othniel here followed in the steps of his brother. He did not fear the Anakim either, and he was willing to do at Debir what Caleb had done at Hebron. It may be assumed, too, that he had already played a vital role in the victory at Hebron, and so did not volunteer blindly for this challenge at Debir. He knew the enemy's size, strength, and ability in fighting, but this did not deter him. If his brother now wanted someone else to take the lead, he was ready. There may have been few others of the day who were" (Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*, 167).

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Later, when it was time to deliver Israel from Cushan-Rishanthaim, king of Aram, the LORD raised up Othniel (Jud 3:7-9). Regarding his courage at this time, the same author goes on to say: "Othniel showed remarkable courage also in moving against the powerful Mesopotamians. This was a still greater challenge than that of the Anakim. It may be, in fact, that the earlier battle had been God's way of preparing Othniel for this later and larger clash. Certainly the courage he had shown then had been a factor in God's selection of him now. This enemy had been in the land for eight years, bringing oppression and causing people to cry out in their suffering to God. God had heard and here called on Othniel to lead in the necessary deliverance (Judg. 3:9). Though advanced in years, Othniel again responded affirmatively, showing the same courage as he had done earlier. He might have argued that someone younger should now be called on, but he didn't. He went as God directed and was used to bring about Israel's deliverance" (167).



ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Judges 3:7-11

7 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. 8 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. 9 But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. 10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. 11 So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

Cf., a complementary passage Judges 1:11-15

11From there they advanced against the people living in Debir (formerly called Kiriath Sepher). 12 And Caleb said, "I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher."

13 Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so Caleb gave his daughter Acsah to him in marriage. 14 One day when she came to Othniel, she urged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, "What can I do for you?"

15 She replied, "Do me a special favor. Since you have given me land in the Negev, give me also springs of water." Then Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Highlight verse 7a.
- * Underline "forgot" and "served" in v. 7.
- * Circle "Asherahs" in v. 7.
- * Box "so that "in vv. 8, 10 and "so" in v. 11 indicating result.
- * Circle "Cushan-Rishathaim" in v. 8.

- * Circle "Aram Naharaim" in v. 8.
- * Box "but" indicating contrast in v. 9.
- * Bracket "son of Kenaz" in v. 9.
- * Bracket "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him" in v. 10.
- * Circle "judge" in v. 10.



day **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

1. Who exactly (v. 7; cf., 2:10-15) did evil in the eyes of the LORD?
2. "They forgot the LORD" (v. 7b). How so?
3. Explain why humanly speaking the Israelites "served the Baals and the Asherahs" (see vv. 5-6).
4. Put the meaning of the <i>metaphor</i> "burned" (v. 8) in your own words.
5. The Israelites were "subject" (v. 8) to the king of Aram for eight years. Describe what that means (cf., 2:14-15).
6. The text does not say the Israelites <i>repented</i> when they cried out to the LORD. Did they—what do you think?
7. Describe the role of the <i>judge</i> in Israel based on what the text says about Othniel.
8. What do you infer from the fact that <i>nothing negative</i> is said (vv. 9-11) about Othniel?
9. Discussion: Talk about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Othniel and by extension to other judges in Israel.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

The book of Judges documents the spiritual decline of the Israelites in Canaan following the death of Joshua to the rise of the monarchy. Once in Canaan the people quickly forgot the acts of God that had given birth to the nation and brought her to the Promised Land. "She settled down and attached herself to Canaan's people, morals, gods, and religious beliefs and practices as readily as to Canaan's agriculture and social life" (The NIV Study Bible, 325). After summarizing what transpired following Joshua's burial in 2:10-23, the author of Judges says succinctly, "The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods" (3:5). The author unpacks the history of this era in a series of recurring cycles. Each cycle contains selected elements from the following list: 1) Israel does evil in the eyes of the LORD. 2) The LORD gives/sells them into the hands of oppressors. 3) Israel serves the oppressor for x years. 4) Israel cries out to the LORD. 5) The LORD raises up a deliverer (i.e., a judge). 6) The Spirit of the LORD is on the deliverer. 7) The oppressor is subdued. 8) The land has "rest" for x years (K. Lawson Younger, The NIV Application Commentary: Judges and Ruth, 35). It's important to note that the cycles don't just repeat; they spiral downward. One commentator observes: "The change is one of progressive deterioration in Israel's condition: in relation to Yahweh, in relation to its enemies, and in relation to its own internal stability . . . The moral decline in the major/cyclical judges is generally reinforced through the amount of verbiage used for each judge. Othniel, the ideal judge, receives the least amount of verbiage; Ehud slightly more; Deborah/Barak more; Gideon more than Jephthah, less than Samson; Jephthah more than Deborah/Barak, less than Gideon or Samson; and Samson, the worst judge and moral nadir of the major/cyclical judges, the most. Thus, the amount of verbiage attached to each major/cyclical judge is generally proportional to his or her spiritual or moral quality: the more moral, the less verbiage; the less moral, the grater the verbiage" (36-37). This presents a challenge for the modern reader who is looking for takeaways from these stories of Israel's ancient heroes. The book says the least about the most admirable judge, Othniel, and

the *most* about the *least* admirable judge, Samson. The book closes on the mournful refrain, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (NKJV).

The Othniel cycle (Jdg 3:7-11) contains all eight of the previous mentioned elements:

- 1) "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs" (v. 7). In this context the word "forgot" entails much more than a lapse in memory. As 2:12 puts it, "They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the people around them." They devoted themselves to the worship of the fertility god, Baal, and his consort, Asherah. About Baal, one author writes: "The popularity of Baal was doubtless due to his association with fertility in its varied aspectshuman, animal, and vegetation . . . The Baal cult was conducted by priests who conducted licentious rites in fields or on high places. Wine, oil, first fruits, and firstlings of flocks were brought to the priests at the shrines. Dances and ritualistic meals formed a part of the ceremony which had an attraction to the Hebrews from the time of their entrance into Canaan until the destruction of Jerusalem (587 B.C.)" (The Biblical World, s.v., "Baal"). And about Asherah, another writes: "Asherah served as a mother goddess and was associated in Biblical times with Baal, the god of fertility. Her symbol was the sacred tree or pole, which corresponds to the stone pillar used in the Baal cult (cf. Judg. 6:28). Among the idolatrous prophets whom Jezebel, the idolatrous wife of Ahab, supported were 'four hundred prophets of Asherah' (1 Kings 18:19)" (s.v., "Asherah").
- 2) "The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim" (v. 8a). This particularly evil king likely hailed from Northwest Mesopotamia (see Ge 24:10). What he was doing so far south puzzles commentators. However, while interesting, the question is largely beside the point as far as the meaning of the text is concerned (see note).
- 3) ". . . whom the Israelites were subject to for eight years" (v. 8b). How fitting! "The Israelites, who choose to serve ('bd) foreign gods (3:7), are made to serve ('bd) a foreign tyrant (3:8). This type of retributive justice is noticed throughout the book (cf., e.g., 1:7)" (Younger, 105). For eight years this

evil Mesopotamian king terrorized the Israelites.

- 4) "But when they cried out to the LORD" (v. 9a). The Israelites cries of distress appear in each recurring cycle, but do their cries imply repentance? Many assume yes, but one commentator argues otherwise. He writes: "This outcry is not to be interpreted as a penitential plea, as though the Israelites have repented. Rather, it is a simple anguishing cry of pain (i.e., 'a yelp of pain') of people in a distressing situation in need of deliverance . . . Yahweh intervenes on Israel's behalf solely on the basis of his compassion for the Israelites in the midst of their distress, not on the basis of their repentance" (102).
- 5) "... he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them" (v. 9b). The role of the judge is evident in the call of Othniel. As one commentator explains: "For us the word judges immediately conjures up images of courts of law and arbitration between individuals in dispute. This was a part of what the judges did, but not their major role. The twelve characters around which the book centers were 'saviors' or 'deliverers,' raised up by God to rescue the nation, both from itself in its persistent slide into godlessness and then, as a consequence, from its increasingly oppressive enemies. Often it was initial success in this latter area which led to a period of relative peace in which the 'judge' ruled over an area as an authority figure dispensing justice and stabilizing the community" (David Jackman, Judges, Ruth, TCC, 23).
- 6) "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him so that he became Israel's judge and went to war" (v. 10a). The Spirit enabled him to do what the LORD raised him up to do. By empowering him, the Spirit equipped him "to act in a way which he could never have done unaided" (68) and thereby guaranteed his success. As evil and intimidating as the enemy was, Othniel trusted in the LORD, who is able to overcome any foe.
- 7) "The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him" (v. 10b). Othniel delivered Israel in tandem with the LORD; they acted as one, which implies that Othniel truly walked

with God. On his victory, one writer observes: "Though details are not given, Othniel's efforts would have had to include certain basic tasks. He first would have had to raise troops. Since he lived at Debir, this would no doubt have been done in that area. He was best known there and would have gained the greatest confidence of the men for them to respond to his call. With troops in hand, he then would have had to train them in some degree. This would not have been easy, when certainly the enemy would have been seen on the watch for any such activity. Finally, he would have had to lead them in actual battle, and this would have been against an army much better trained and equipped. The enemy troops would have been skilled warriors" (Wood, 16)-all of which he would have known upfront. Nevertheless, he responded obediently to God's call!

Like all biblical narratives, this one has an upper story and a lower story. The upper story involves the LORD's relationship to his covenant people. He had told Moses before the Israelites entered the land, "These people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them" (Dt 31:16). When they did, they experienced the "curses" the warned them about (Dt 28; 31:14-22). But God did not abandon his people as they abandoned him. He sent judges to deliver and save them. The lower story involves the remarkable character of Othniel. One writer praises him in these words: "The lack of mention of any character flaw immediately alerts the reader to his model qualities. Many commentators have noted that the narrator writes nothing negative about this man. This appears to be intentional. Therefore, Othniel appears as the paragon by which the other major or cyclical judges are assessed. He functions in the macrostructure of the cycles section as the 'ideal' judge . . . Othniel evinces the kind of devotion and service to the Lord that results in this type of glorification of Yahweh. In a world where it is often difficult to find true godly role models, Othniel serves as a breath of fresh air" (Younger, 105, 108).

The Message of the Passage

Othniel provides us with an example of obedience and courage grounded in confident trust in God that we can all follow.



EMBRACE – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

• Reflect on the passage: Think about what God wants you to know; how God wants you to feel; and what God wants you to do.

notes N

STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 7 *forgot, served* These words allude to a more detailed description of the time of the judges given in 2:10-13. "The statement that 'they forgot the Lord their God' is unique to the Othniel section'" (Younger, 101). The Israelites did not suffer from temporary amnesia; they intentionally and actively abandoned the LORD (D. I. Block, LORD, NAC, 151).
- v. 8 *Cushan-Rishathaim* Lit., "Cushan of Double Wickedness." "The name means 'dark, doubly wicked!' and is clearly a pejorative (parents do not typically name their children such!). The obvious implication is that he is evil, really bad-hence, the worst of the oppressors" (Younger, 105). It "is not a likely personal name, and it would appear that the historian has made a deliberate distortion to cast ridicule upon this oppressor" (Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges and Ruth*, TOTC, 73).
- v. 8 *Aram Naharaim* "Located in the area between the Euphrates and Habur rivers in northern Mesopotamia, this would make Cushan-Rishathaim the oppressor who comes the greatest distance to oppress Israel" (Younger, 104-105; see detailed discussion in Wood, 92-95; Cundall, 72-73; Younger, 106-107). "Some scholars have regarded 'Aram' as an alteration of 'Edom' (a slight difference in one Hebrew letter), which was located appropriately close to Judah in the south" (F. Duane Lindsey, "Judges," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary: Old Testament*, 386).
- v. 9 son of Kenaz "Othniel, Israel's deliverer at the time, was of the tribe of Judah and probably the younger brother of Caleb. He had asked for Hebron as his inheritance (Josh. 14:6-15). The question of the relationship between the two men, either as nephew or brother, is sufficiently problematical to call for some attention. The answer to the question hinges on the meaning of the descriptive phrase, used identically in Judges 1:13 and 3:9, 'Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.' The phrase could mean that either Kenaz or Othniel was Caleb's younger brother, but two matters argue in favor of Othniel holding that relationship. The first involves the use of the adjective 'younger.' Because the adjective is used to modify 'brother,' it is more likely that the one being referred to as 'brother' is the one who is more important to the story, and that is Othniel. Kenaz is mentioned only incidentally, as Othniel's father. The second is that the Massorete scholars believed Othniel was Caleb's brother, because in the Hebrew text they made a division between 'son of Kenaz' (ben-kenaz) and 'brother of Caleb' ('ahi Kaleb) by use of a tiphhah (cf. Josh. 15:17). Admittedly, a problem arises on this basis, for Caleb otherwise is said to have been the 'son of Jephunneh' (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6), while Othniel here and elsewhere (e.g. Josh. 15:17) is ascribed as 'son of Kenaz.' Because Caleb is sometimes called a 'Kenezite' (e.g., Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6, 14), some scholars have resolved the problem by saying that 'son of Kenaz,' in reference to Othniel, is only another way of saying that he too was a 'Kenezite,' thus making both Caleb and Othniel hark back to a prior ancestor by the name of Kenaz, allowing both to be the immediate sons of Jephunneh. This explanation would be possible in reference to the usage in Judges 1:13 and 3:9, but suffers difficulty in 1 Chronicles 4:13, where both Othniel and Seraiah–apparently brothers-are listed as 'sons of Kenaz,' and this is in a genealogical list. A more likely answer to the problem, then, is that Othniel was a younger half-brother of Caleb, through the same mother but different father" (Wood, 163, 165, italics added; cf., Younger, 66, n. 17).
- v. 10 *Spirit of the Lord* "The supernatural empowering of the judges of Israel is here revealed for the first time. The same expression is used of Jephthah (11:29), but there is no stereotyped formula. It is noted that the Spirit of the Lord 'took possession of' (RSV) or 'clothed itself' with (RV mg.) Gideon (6:34); that it 'began to stir' or 'impel' or 'rush upon' Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 1:14) . . . Since Pentecost (Acts 2) a more general and permanent endowment of the Holy Spirit has been the privilege of every disciple" (Cundall, 74)



Connect the **FAMILY**. Kids Kindergarten thru 6th grade receive Kid Pix tokens for discipleship activities completed during the week.

Family Time

On September 10, 2001, Brennan Savage had worked the overnight shift at the Queens Beach, NY Fire Department. Savage was heading out to meet a few of his firefighter friends to go surfing before he went home to go to sleep. He noticed smoke coming from the Twin Towers. Instead of saying, "Oh, I'm off duty, the other guys will take care of it," Savage went back inside the fire house, climbed to the roof to get a better look and started taking pictures. He noticed an airliner flying low and wondered why. Then he saw the second plane hit the Twin Towers and knew he needed to go back to work. Without any sleep, Brennan Savage jumped in the fire truck and was one of the first firefighters at Ground Zero before the Towers fell. There are many stories of people rising to the occasion when called upon to do so. Othniel was one of those people. His faith and confidence in God gave him the courage to go to war for God's people. As a parent I hope my kids will answer the call to stand firm in their faith when the time comes. Their success starts now as we model courage and train them to be obedient to the Father. I'm praying for you this week as you disciple your children.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Judges 3:7-11

- 1. According to verse 7, what was the condition of the Israelites' hearts?
- 2. Who did the Lord raise up to help?
- 3. What was the result?

What Do You Think

The key to Othniel's success is found in verse 10. God was with him as he went into battle. What do you think would have happened if he went in his own strength? What are some things you need God's strength to accomplish right now?

What R U Going To Do

Pay attention this week to any opportunity to rise to the occasion. Does someone need help at school? Do you know someone who is sick and needs encouragement? Is there any way you can help your family this week? Ask God to help you, then DO IT!

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Hope - I can cope with the problems of life and death with the help of Jesus **Memory Verse**

Col 3:15 - Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

I memorized CC _	KIDPIX COUPON and Verse Family completed Say Think Do
Child's name	Grade Parent's signature
	Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.

CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14 I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians* 2:8-9 I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 *Timothy* 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2 I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12 I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians* 4:15-16 I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16* I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to

show compassion to those in need. Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19 I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7 I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalm* 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew* 6:33 I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6 I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts* 2:44-47 I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world. Giving Away My Time Colossians

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1 I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians* 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs* 3:3-4 I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13 I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4 I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12 I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15 I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5 I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews* 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.