

BIG QUESTION UNDER INVESTIGATION

We're in... Unit 8: The God Who Loves

Unit 8 Big Question and Answer and Song:

"What Is God's Love for His People Like?"

PFI NIV Songs 8, Tracks 3,4

Unit 8 Bible Verse and Song: 1 Chronicles 16:34 NIV 1984

"Give thanks to the LORD for He is good. His love endures forever."

PFI NIV Songs 8, Track 5

BIBLE TRUTH

We're learning... Bible Truth 4:

God Loves His People by Caring for Their Needs

God is the most wonderful Father anyone could ever imagine. He is always good; always wise. He loves His children with the deepest of loves. He always takes care of their needs. When we turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as Savior, God becomes our heavenly Father and we become His adopted children.

God's people know that God has already taken care of their greatest need of all: He sent Jesus to die for their sins. When they remember that their loving Father was willing to give up even His own dear Son to save them, they know they can trust Him to take care all the rest of their needs, too.

God delights to hear His people ask Him for what they need; and, He delights to provide them with what they need. He always gives them what He knows is the very best for them.

BIBLE VERSE

How do I know this is true? The Bible tells me so!

Bible Truth 4 Bible Verse: Psalm 23:1-6

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the day of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

CASE STORY

2 Peter

Our story is: The Case of the Two Needy Men.

As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. Who were the two needy men? Who did they rely upon to get what they needed?
2. Which one only truly had all his needs met? Why?

This story takes place in New Testament times, in Rome, when Nero was Caesar. This was about thirty years after Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead and went back to heaven.

Apparently Caesar Nero wasn't that much to look at. He had a head of blond curls, but weak, blue eyes and a lot of acne. He had a big belly and bad body odor, too! No, Caesar Nero certainly wasn't much to look at—or even smell—but when he entered the room, people bowed. And when he wanted something, he got it. Caesar Nero was a man who took care of his own needs—no matter what.

Nero had his mother Agrippina to thank for much of the good things he enjoyed. She was the one who had Caesar Claudius adopt Nero and choose him to be the next Caesar over his own son, Britannicus. Agrippina also had the great teacher Seneca brought from exile to teach Nero philosophy, science, Latin and how to run a government. And it was she who had her husband Caesar Claudius killed with poisoned mushrooms so Nero would be crowned emperor over the Roman Empire at just age sixteen.

As Caesar, Nero became proud. He didn't need his mother or Seneca anymore. He was the most powerful man in the world. He could get whatever he wanted—and he wanted a lot! He wanted a magnificent, new palace, surrounded by woods, parks, zoos, waterfalls and fountains. He wanted a lake big enough to sail ships on it; and a market, an outdoor theatre, a big workout center (called a gymnasium) and a luxurious bathhouse with steamy salt and spring water for Nero and his guests to enjoy.

He would name the palace Domus Aurea: the Golden Palace. It would have walls decorated in gold, silver, jewels and fine paintings. One dining room would have sprinklers in the ceiling that sprayed perfume down upon the guests. Another would have a ceiling painted with the

sun, moon, stars, and planets that would rotate in keeping with the time of day or night.

Most incredible of all would be the 120-foot-high (about as tall as a ten-story building) bronze statue of himself that he would place at the palace's entrance. After all, shouldn't he be honored as Nero the Great: king over the Roman Empire? Provider for its millions' of people?

But there was a problem with Nero's palace plans. There was no place in Rome to put it! It would take up hundreds of acres, and the city was already dangerously crowded. Hundreds of thousands of people squeezed into shabby houses built along dark, narrow passageways that were more like tunnels than streets.

But remember. Nero was a man used to meeting his own needs. He would find a way to get what he wanted. What if something was to happen to get rid of all those dark streets swarming with life...too much life, some might say? Think what beautiful, wide streets and new buildings could be built there instead! It certainly would be much healthier for the people and whose to say there wouldn't be space left over for Nero's dream palace?

Just a thought of Nero's...or perhaps a plan? No one knows for sure. But somehow, on July 19th 64 A.D., a fire broke out in some shops at one end of the Circus Maximus—the huge sports arena—in Rome. The fire lasted nine days, destroying two-thirds of the city. About half a million people lost everything.

What a caring emperor Nero seemed in those days after the fire. He put shelters in his own gardens to house them and he brought in low-cost corn so all could afford to eat. He offered sacrifices to the Roman gods asking them to help the people hurt by the fire.

But even as Nero did these good things, the people began to say that Nero had set the fire on purpose. And when he began to build Domus Aurea where the fire had been, the people were sure they were right. Many hated him. Some wanted to kill him.

But don't forget: Nero was the man who took care of his own needs. He knew what to do about these rumors. He would blame the fire on someone else. Someone most Romans hated already: the Christians.

"Those Christians! They're the ones who started that fire!" Nero lied. "They refuse to worship the emperor and the Roman gods. They say their God will judge Rome for its sinful ways. They hate Romans. That's why they started this

fire!" he told the people.

The people believed Nero's lies. They didn't like the Christians and their strange beliefs. They rejoiced as Nero sent bands of soldiers to gather up the Christians and send them to their death. Some were dipped in wax; some were thrown to the lions; some were burned alive; still others were crucified. Nero, the man who could meet all his needs, had done it again. He sat in his palace in satisfaction. He had turned people's angry from him to the Christians.

The apostle Peter was in Rome when Nero's great persecution of the Christians began. He had come there to encourage the Roman believers in their faith when the great fire broke out. He had not been arrested during those first, terrible days when so many Christians lost their lives; but, he was not to be spared forever. Nero sent out soldiers to arrest more Christians and captured Peter. At last! One of the Christians' greatest leaders would soon be dead! The Romans must have thought.

Great leader! Ha! Peter couldn't be more unlike Nero, the great Roman leader. Peter was poor. He had no armies. He was helpless to take care of his own needs, let alone others. And what about this Jesus who Peter worshiped? He was supposed to be the Son of God who paid for God's people's sins while He died on the cross, then rose from the grave, in victory over death. But if Jesus really was the Son of God, where was He now when Peter and the rest of the Christians were in such great need? Dead and gone... the Romans believed.

But Peter knew the truth. So did the other believers. It looked like Jesus had left them all alone; but He had not. He DID reign in heaven. He DID have power to take care of God's people's needs. He was taking care of them right then. His Holy Spirit was working in their hearts, giving them courage and reminding them of Jesus' promises to them. Promises like: "I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lived and believes in Me will never die." And, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

No. Peter didn't fear. Perhaps he had no way to take care of his needs, but he knew God did. God would be with him, helping him to the very end.

But Peter didn't just think of himself in these last days of his life. He thought of the other Christians spread throughout Asia Minor. They struggled, too. They had teachers who taught them lies about God. They had

enemies who made fun of them and even hurt them for believing in Jesus. Peter wanted to encourage them to keep to keep on believing in God and trusting that He would take care of all their needs, too.

So Peter turned to his friend Silvanus who was with him. "Silvanus, write down one last letter for me."

Getting out a scroll, Silvanus wrote as Peter spoke: "From Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To you who through our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received faith in God. May God fill you with His peace and grace through Jesus!" Peter urged them. "Don't be afraid or discouraged. Keep living for Jesus. Remember that His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. He has given us His very great and precious promises. Keep growing in goodness, and in knowing God and His Word. If you do, you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus has made it clear that soon I will die and go to be with Him. I'm sending you this letter so you will always remember these things when I am gone," Peter said.

Peter spoke these words and many others. When he finished, he said to Silvanus, "Give this to the Christians in Asia Minor." Silvanus promised he would.

Peter died soon after. Soldiers tied up his hands and took him to a cross to die. Some say Peter asked to be crucified upside, feeling unworthy to die the same way as His Savior Jesus had. No one knows for sure. But we do know that God was with Peter, either upside down or right side up, as he died on that cross. And, we know that by His divine power, the God who gave Peter everything he needed for life and for godliness, gave him everything he needed to die for Him, too. And best of all, we know that when Peter's suffering was over, his spirit went to be with Jesus in heaven. There at last, he knew the fullest delight any person can ever know: life in God's presence: rich and full and indescribably wonderful forever. Yes. God had taken care of all his needs--this man who seemed to have nothing.

Our Bible Truth is:

God Loves His People By Caring For Their Needs

Our Bible Verse is: Psalm 23:1-6

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no

for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the day of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Do you wonder what happened to Nero, the man who thought he could take care of his own needs? In the years after Peter died, Nero's plans fell apart. Nero thought persecuting and killing Christians would put an end to belief in Jesus; but instead, it led to many Romans hearing the good news of Jesus and believing. They saw God's divine power at work in them, giving them courage to keep confessing Jesus as their Savior even as they suffered terribly and died. "Surely someone could die like this only if what they say about Jesus is true," they thought.

But this was the least of Nero's problems. The Roman people completely turned against him. They made plans to kill him. In the end, Nero killed himself before someone else did. Domus Aurea was abandoned. The beautiful grounds were divided up and his magnificent palace was allowed to crumble. His head was removed from the 120 feet bronze statue.

Worst of all, when Nero died, he died in his sins, having never repented and trusted in Jesus as his Savior. The man who though he could take care of his own needs, didn't take care of any of his real needs at all. How very sad!

What about you and me? Who are we like? Are we like Nero? Have we tried to take care of our self and have nothing to do with God? Or, like Peter, have we trusted Jesus to save us from our sins and to take care of all our needs? If we are like Nero, the wonderful news is it is not too late! Even today we can turn from our sins and trust Jesus as our own Savior. He promises to forgive us and make us God's very own, dearly loved people. And if we do, we can know that no matter what we go through God has given us His divine power to give us everything we need for life and godliness.

Let's praise God for His wonderful promises to always take care of all His people's needs. Let's ask Him to fill us with His divine power that we might have everything we need for life and godliness to the praise of His glory!

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False:
 God gets annoyed when His people keep asking for Him to take care of their needs.
 Answer: False! God always delights to hear His people's prayers and to answer them. He loves to take care of His people!

2. Crack the Case Questions

a. Who were the two needy men? Who did they rely upon to get what they needed?
 Answer: Nero and Peter. Nero relied upon himself. Peter relied upon Jesus.

b. Who looked like he had all his needs met? Who truly had all his needs met? Why?
 Answer: Nero seemed to get everything he wanted. But only Peter truly had all his needs met. Jesus gave him everything he needed to live the life God wanted him to live. And, Jesus also gave Peter forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Sadly, Nero never did.

3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse:
Psalm 23:1-6
 "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green ____, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His ____ sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they ____ me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD ____."
 Answers: pastures; name's; comfort; forever.

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN

The King of Love
PFI NIV Songs 8, Tracks 12,13

Verse 1
 The King of love my shepherd is,
 Whose goodness faileth never.
 I nothing lack if I am His
 and He is mine forever.

Verse 4
 In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
 With Thee dear Lord beside me.
 Thy rod and staff, my comfort still,
 Thy cross before to guide me.

Words: Henry Baker, Psalm 23 Music: Traditional Irish Melody

God's people praise God for being the King of love. He is their king who they obey. It is delightful having Him as their king because all that He does comes from His heart of love for them and for the glory of His name. He takes care of them like a good shepherd does his sheep. Sheep are very stupid and need someone to take care all of their needs or else they will die. God does this for His people. They lack nothing; His goodness never fails them; even when facing death, they still fear nothing "ill" because He is with them. God's people know God will care for them after death by taking them to heaven to be with Him forever. We can become God's people when we turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior.

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY

A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication

A God, we praise You for being the Provider for Your people's every need, even when facing death.

C God, we confess that many times, like Nero, we are selfish and greedy. We think about what we want and forget You and Your good ways. We need a Savior!

T God, we thank You for promising to always give Your people the power they need to endure even the hardest things, such as persecution and death.

S God, work in our hearts! Help us to turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior. Change our hearts so that we are not greedy and selfish like Nero, but are people who love You and live for You.

BIBLE VERSE SONG

The LORD Is My Shepherd
PFI NIV Songs 8, Track 14

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
 He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul,
 He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
 Even though I walk through the valley of death,
 I will fear no evil, For You are with me,
 Your rod and Your staff they comfort me,
 Surely goodness and mercy will follow me,
 All of the days of my life,
 And I will dwell in the house of the LORD,
 Forever and ever and ever.
 Psalm Twenty-three. verses one through four, and six.

Words adapted from Psalm 23:1-4,6 Constance Dever © 2011

These verses remind us that God loves His people and cares for their needs completely, just like a good shepherd loves and takes care of his sheep.