

“I Was in Prison...”

The Man Possessed by Demons
Luke 8:26-39

Level C

Ages 11-14

Series Theme: You shall love the Lord your God, and your neighbor as yourself.

Lesson Focus: The Lord frees us from the evils that imprison us if we ask Him for help.

Reading Summary: Jesus and His disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee and landed in the land of the Gadarenes. They were met by a man possessed by demons who lived among the tombs outside of the town. Recognizing Jesus, he begged Him not to torment him. Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. Although he was chained, the spirit had often seized the man so that he broke his chains and was driven into the wilderness. Jesus asked the spirit’s name, and the spirit answered, “Legion,” because it was really many demons. The demons begged to enter into a herd of swine that were grazing nearby. As soon as this happened, the swine rushed down a steep slope into the Sea of Galilee and drowned. People came to see what had happened and found the man in his right mind, sitting at Jesus’ feet. People in the region were afraid and asked Jesus to leave. He told the man to return to his house and tell others what the Lord had done for him.

| Lesson 6 | | Materials Supplied | Materials Needed |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Welcome Warm-up Activity (2-3 minutes) | Activity | Tug of War directions p. 2 | 2-3 yards (2 meters) rope |
| 2. Focus on the Word Use all activities (5-7 minutes) | Read the Word and Talk About It | see <i>Reading Summary</i> above discussion guide p. 2 | Bible or copy of Luke 8:26-39 |
| 3. Learn by Doing Choose 1-2 activities (15-20 minutes) | Activity-based Discussion students read about temptation and make a poster that shows how evil spirits attack us and how the angels defend us | Spiritual Balance directions p. 3 <i>Spiritual Balance</i> pp. 5-6 <i>Spiritual Balance Human Being</i> p. 7 <i>Spiritual Balance Angels Evil Spirits</i> p. 8 | Scissors; large piece of paper or poster board for mounting project; sticky notes in three colors; markers in three colors, e.g. red, black, blue |
| | Game discuss the importance of shunning evils as sins; write evils on water balloons decorated as pigs and throw them | Water Balloon Pig Toss directions p. 4 <i>Pig Drawing Ideas</i> p. 9 | water balloons, water, permanent markers <i>optional:</i> material for making targets, e.g. chalk on a wall, cardboard boxes, etc. |
| 4. Wrap It Up (2-3 minutes) | Take the Message Home introduce the quotation for the week | Take Home Cards p. 10 | |

1. Welcome Warm-up Activity

Tug-of-War

Supplies needed: 2-3yds (2m) rope with the center marked

Explore the spiritual forces at play when we are tempted to do something wrong. Ask for three volunteers to play Tug-of-War. Place one volunteer at the mid-point of the rope. The others will each take an end. The goal is for the person in the middle to hold onto the rope and stay in the same place while the two ends are pulled in opposite directions. Students should pull with controlled strength to try to move the person in the middle toward their side. The person in the middle tries to stay put, pulling in which ever direction is needed to do this.

Scenarios like this take place in our minds every day. The forces at the ends of the rope are like the forces of heaven and hell. While we live in the world our minds are mid-way between these forces. The Lord guards our freedom every second by balancing these forces in our minds. Because of this we can freely choose between the influences of heaven or hell.

2. Focus on the Word

Read: Luke 8:26-39 and *Heaven and Hell* 257 quotation at the bottom of page 3

What might life in prison be like? Prisoners are isolated, cut off from their family and loved ones, have few privileges, cannot freely do what they want, etc.

This story is about a man who was imprisoned by evil spirits. Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee, and, as He landed, a man possessed by demons (evil spirits) came to Him. Since clothing represents ideas that guide actions, what might the man's nakedness show? He was not guided by true ideas but was acting from false ideas inspired by the evil spirits who had imprisoned him.

The man lived outside of town in the tombs of the dead. Houses picture the human mind. A clean house is like a mind filled with clean thoughts. A dark, decaying house is like a mind filled with selfish thoughts. We sometimes say, "That stinks!" if we do not get our way. Devils in hell live in dark stinking places, another kind of self-made prison.

The demons begged Jesus not to torment them. Does the Lord torment or imprison us? No. Conflict happens when we know what is right but do not want to do it. Even though we may sometimes feel that the truth is the cause of our conflicted feelings, the Lord never tempts us.

Why did the Lord call the demons "Legion"? Because there were actually many of them. **In order to stop doing something evil we have to see it and name it in the light of truth, e.g. I told a lie. "Legion" represents all the evils from the loves of self and the world (see *True Christianity* 533).**

The Lord sent the demons into the pigs, which rushed down into the sea. The evil spirits were cast out, back into hell. Once the demons left the man, he returned to his right mind. He could once again freely choose between good and evil in his life.

Although we can no longer be taken over physically by evil spirits, they do work hard to imprison our minds. In what ways do our choices to do evil imprison us? Brainstorm ideas. For example, telling one lie can lead a person into a tangled web of lies to cover up the first lie, etc. We may feel cut off from others (and the Lord) when we think only of ourselves. For example, you and a friend audition for a play; she gets the part you want; jealousy and anger harm your relationship. **As He freed the man with the demons, the Lord can also free our minds from evil if we ask Him to. We must recognize Him and ask Him for help.**

The Lord asks us to visit those in prison. How can we visit people who are imprisoned by evil spirits—for example if people are in a bad mood? We can remain strong in what we know to be right. If asked to help, we can listen to people's concerns and gently help them see how their choices may be contributing to their sadness and isolation. We can be there when they are ready to be friends.

3. Learn by Doing

Choose one or two activities

Choice Spiritual Balance

The Lord is always working to bring balance in our minds between the forces of heaven and hell. Conflict arises when we know what is right but do not want to do it. This conflict is temptation. In this activity students explore the spiritual forces at play during temptation. They read passages from the Writings and note what the angels and evil spirits are doing when a person is tempted. Then they put together a diagram showing how the evil spirits and angels affect the person's thinking.

1. All people who want to go to heaven experiences tests of their love and faith at some point. These temptations prepare people for heaven.
2. There are two angels and two evil spirits with each of us all the time. They are the source of our thoughts and feelings. The angels inspire true thoughts and good feelings, and the evil spirits inspire false thoughts and bad feelings. We experience mental conflicts when we know what is right but want to do something that is wrong.
3. The Writings tell us what is happening in our minds while we experience this kind of conflict. Hand out *Spiritual Balance* (pp. 5-6). Choose a few passages to read aloud with your group.
4. Divide students into three groups. Give each group one color of sticky notes. Groups will copy sets of words onto colored sticky notes and display them on the *Spiritual Balance Human Being* (p. 7).

Group 1: Copy underlined words and stick them **on** the human figure. These words are what the human is thinking.

Group 2: Copy **bold** words and stick them **below** the figure. These words show what the evil spirits are doing.

Group 3: Copy words in CAPITALS and stick them **above** the figure. These words show what the angels are doing.

5. What tactics do evil spirits use to persuade people of their point of view? (e.g. they bring up memories of things done wrong in the past and use them to condemn, they bring up false ideas, etc.)
6. In what ways do the angels defend people against these attacks? (e.g. they bring up good and true ideas)
7. Why is it hard to detect the hells at work? (they act secretly and make people feel as if they are acting from their own free will)
8. Can people experience spiritual temptations if they do not care about the Lord and heaven? (no)

Materials Needed

a copy of *Spiritual Balance* pp. 5-6 for each student; one copy of *Spiritual Balance Human Being* and *Spiritual Balance Angels Evil Spirits* pp. 7 & 8; large piece of paper or poster board; sticky notes in three colors; three colors of pens, e.g. red, black, blue

Prepare in Advance

Cut apart *Spiritual Balance Angels Evil Spirits* p. 8 on the center line. Mount the *Spiritual Balance Human Being* and *Angels and Evil Spirits* on a wall or poster as shown in the picture below.



The Writings for the New Church make the following statement about spirit possession today:

There are natural spirits who come to a person but do not join themselves with a person's thoughts, but enter his body and take over its senses, talking through his mouth and acting through his limbs, believing that everything of the person's is their own. These are the spirits who possess people; but they have been cast into hell by the Lord and moved completely away; so possession like this is no longer possible. See *Heaven and Hell* 257

Choice

Water Balloon Pig Toss

The first thing we must do to escape from the imprisonment of the hells and start a new life leading to heaven is to look to the Lord and shun evils as sins against Him (see *Charity 1*). Students will discuss what it means to shun evils, draw pig features on water balloons, write evils on the balloons, and then toss them away.



1. What is heaven? (a state where loving the Lord and other people are most important, and where loving ourselves and worldly things are least important)
2. What is the first thing we must do to go to heaven? (shun evils as sins against the Lord—put simply, this means not doing things that the Word tells us are wrong)
3. What are examples of things the Word tells us we are not to do? (lying, cheating, stealing, swearing, killing, coveting, etc.)
4. Give each student several water balloons and a permanent marker. Decorate each balloon to look like a pig. Show *Pig Drawing Ideas* (p. 9) to get students started.
5. Write one evil you would like to get out of your life on each balloon.
6. Take the balloons outside and burst them by throwing them at a target outside. Then clean up.
7. Remind students that becoming a heavenly person involves getting rid of evils by throwing them out of our lives—just as we destroyed the pig balloons by throwing them away from us.

Materials Needed

Pig Drawing Ideas p. 9, several pink water balloons for each student, permanent markers, water, space outside to toss balloons
optional: set up target(s) that can get soaked, e.g. chalk drawing on wall, cardboard boxes, etc.

Prepare in Advance

Purchase balloons. Fill with water. Put in a bucket for class. *Optional*: set up targets.

New Church Concept Evil Imprisons Us

People who are infested by evils from hell are as though bound in prison, for they cannot help but think about evil, even if they will good. This gives rise to an inner combat and distress from which they cannot be set free, almost like people in chains. *Apocalypse Revealed 99*

4. Wrap It Up

Take the Message Home

Read this quotation aloud: “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The possessed man was trapped in his own mind and body by evil spirits. We can become trapped in our minds in a way too, for example by being angry or worried. Being stuck like that is like being in prison. Evil spirits actively work to keep us trapped in negative thoughts and feelings. Our minds can be set free by thinking about true ideas we know, sharing our problems with someone we trust, or by reading the Word or other helpful books. Try to notice when negative thoughts and feelings start to come up because noticing is the first step toward breaking free!

Give *Take Home Cards* (two per page, p. 10) to the students as they leave and suggest they put them up where they will see them this week.



Spiritual Balance

Temptation happens when **a true idea or a good motivation that is important to a person is attacked** by the evil spirits and **DEFENDED BY THE ANGELS** who are with him. There can be no temptation unless a person loves the truth that he or she knows. Anyone who does not love the true ideas he knows, or is not affected by it, is not troubled about it at all, but anyone who loves the truth worries that the truth might be harmed and lose its power to guide that person (see *Arcana Coelestia* 4274).

People who are going through temptation experience doubts about the goal they are working toward. That goal is the love against which **evil spirits fight** and in doing that they place the goal in doubt. The more a person loves something, the more it is placed in doubt. Unless a person's love or goal is placed in doubt, and even to despair, there would be no temptation (*Arcana Coelestia* 1820).

During temptation evil spirits **set off a person's false ideas and evil loves**. They **bring out memories** of whatever he or she has thought and done since early childhood. Evil spirits do this so **cleverly** and **wickedly** that it is impossible to describe it. But the angels who are with the person **DRAW OUT GOOD AND TRUE IDEAS** that he has AND in this way **DEFEND HIM**. A person experiences this as his conscience tormenting him (see *Arcana Coelestia* 751).

There are two kinds of temptation, the first involves the understanding, the second involves the will. When a person's temptation involves his understanding, evil spirits **bring up evil deeds** he has done, and use these to **accuse and condemn him**. They **activate his good deeds** too, **but corrupt them** in a thousand ways. At the same time they **trigger his thoughts**. Temptations like this are relatively mild (see *Arcana Coelestia* 751).

Spiritual Balance *continued*

When a temptation involves what a person loves, it is not so much what he does and thinks that are stirred up. Instead evil spirits **inflare his evil desires** and **attack through what he actually wants**. They do it so **secretly** that nobody can believe it is them doing it. They **worm their way into everything** a person wants and almost instantly **twist** and **convert the love for what is good and true into a love for what is evil and false**. They act in such a way that people think that these things come from themselves and from their own free will. Temptations like this are very severe and are felt as inward pain and burning torment (see *Arcana Coelestia* 751).

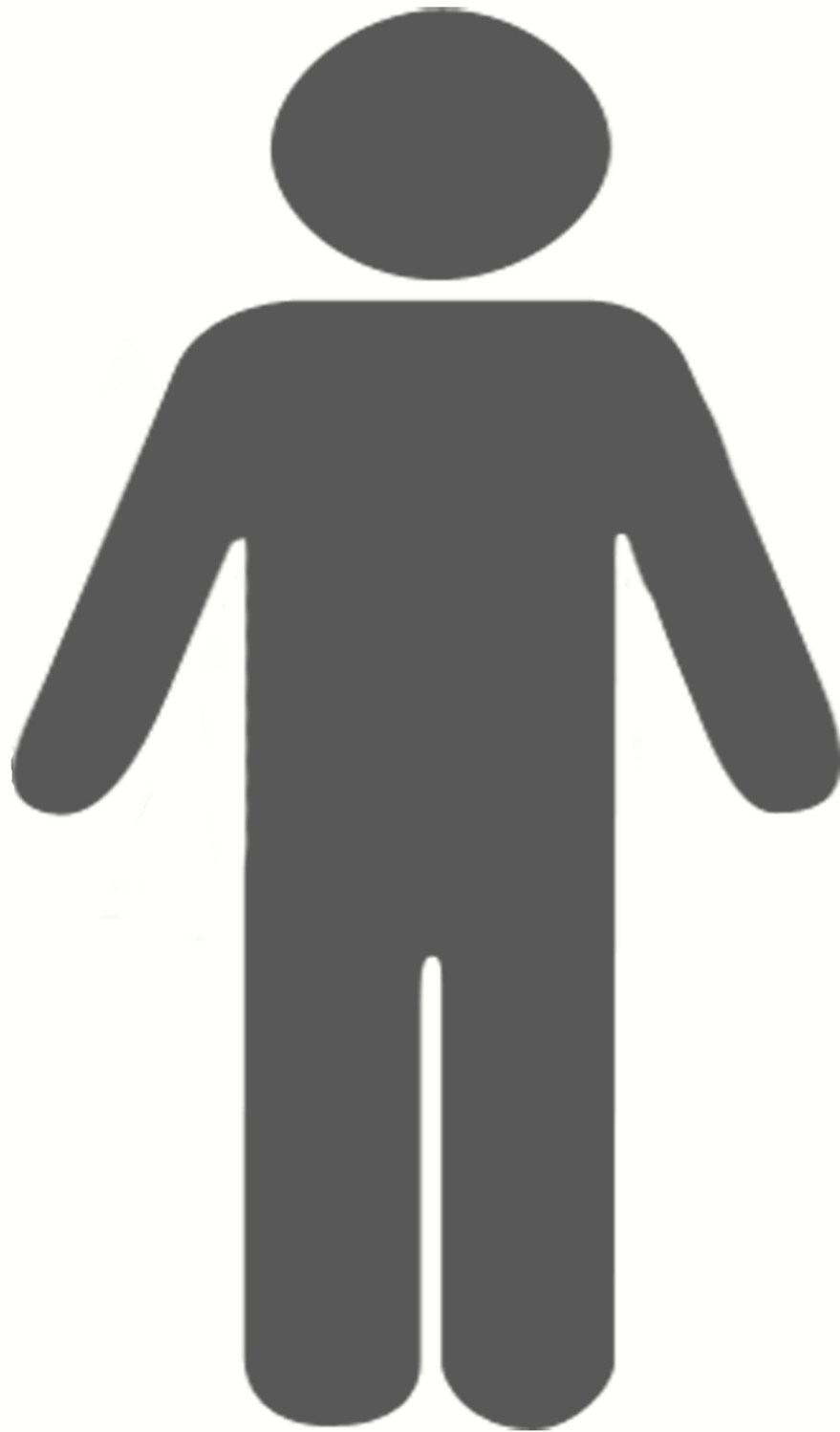
THE LORD GIVES each person TRUE IDEAS and GOOD LOVES. These truths and goods are REMNANTS.... When a person experiences temptations, the angels with him DRAW OUT TRUE IDEAS with which they PROTECT HIM AGAINST THE EVIL SPIRITS who **activate false ideas** with him (see *Arcana Coelestia* 737).

Temptations are the means by which the EVIL LOVES AND FALSE IDEAS with a person ARE EXPOSED and REMOVED (*Arcana Coelestia* 5246).

So long as temptation continues, a person thinks that the Lord is absent because he is troubled by evil spirits so severely that he can hardly believe that God exists. Yet THE LORD IS more CLOSELY PRESENT than a person can ever believe. When temptation stops, the person receives consolation and then believes that the Lord is present (see *Arcana Coelestia* 840).

After temptation NEW LIGHT shines forth (see *Arcana Coelestia* 5246).





Angels

Evil Spirits





"I Was in Prison"

Read: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

Reflect: In this story, the possessed man was trapped by evil spirits in his mind and body. We can sometimes get trapped in our minds as well. We might get stuck on being angry or worried. Being stuck is like being in prison, and evil spirits want us to be trapped like that. They work hard to keep us in negative thoughts and feelings, but true ideas can break through those negative thoughts and feeling to set our minds free. Those true ideas might be spoken to us by caring friends or come from reading the Word.

Respond: It is useful to try to notice when negative thoughts and feelings come. Just noticing is the first step. Once you have noticed, you can work on breaking free! For example, if a friend or family member upsets you, you might feel angry and even think you hate that person. One way to escape might be to think of a time that person did something kind for you or a time when you felt close to him or her. Other ways to work on escaping are reading the Word, asking the Lord for help, and talking to other people. It can be very hard to escape from negative thoughts and feelings. It's OK to ask for help!

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